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**A CASE STUDY ON THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE
SERVICE DELIVERY BY INTRODUCING A
‘VIRTUAL’ CONTACT CENTRE**

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Dissertation

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Abstract

The piloting of a 'Virtual' Contact Centre (VCC) was identified at Flintshire County Council as a priority for an Access To Services Review. This would offer the customer an alternative method of contacting the Council, to request service and information. What did not necessarily follow was that the actual service received would be to the improved satisfaction of the customer.

The research topic was therefore to determine whether *improved access to services by means of a 'Virtual' Contact Centre actually improved service delivery.*

The research was undertaken using a 'pilot' Case Study of an implementation in Flintshire County Council between 2002 and 2004. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collated through consultation and interview, and investigated and analysed in tandem with a literature review.

The main finding of the study was that the 'pilot' Case Study had not produced significant evidence to wholly support the claim. However, the analysis of the data had indicated that the VCC provided a welcome alternative means of contacting the Council. It was clear from the study that the VCC facility was being used, though it would appear that some access channels had been more popular than others.

Thus, although the hypothesis was not fully proven, there was clear evidence of the potential for improvement in customer satisfaction being realised through a VCC. Recommendations are proposed to address the issues.

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My son Adam, my daughter-in-law Anne, my best friend Ann Robbins and Alison Burrows - my 'team' of proof-readers - without whose input this study could not have been completed

Other colleagues and friends who have supported me in the final production of this dissertation

"Masters are not those who never fail: they are those who never quit"
Anonymous.

Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed:

Date:

Dedication

I dedicate this research dissertation to the memory of my mum, who sadly passed away while this work was being completed.

She would have been so proud!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Government Agenda and Drivers

In 1997, the Labour Party under the lead of Tony Blair promised to build a modern, fairer Britain. The Labour Party's Election Manifesto at that time affirmed the need for new politics. It stated that the reason for having created New Labour was to meet the challenges of a different world. The millennium symbolised a new era opening up for Britain and to accomplish this meant more than just a change of Government, but an aim to set British political life on a new course for the future.

The Manifesto stated that for Local Government, decision-making was to be less constrained by Central Government, and more accountable to the local people. Every Council would be required to publish a local Performance Plan. This plan would set out targets for service improvement that the Councils were expected to achieve. The Audit Commission was given additional powers to monitor performance and promote efficiency, and on its advice the Government would, where necessary, send in a management team with full powers to remedy failure.

In 1999, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Jack Cunningham, presented the 'Modernising Government Paper' to Parliament, detailing the Government's mission to modernise and renew our country for the new millennium.

"The Government has a mission to modernise - renewing our country for the new millennium. We are modernising our schools, our hospitals, our economy and our criminal justice system. We are modernising our democratic framework, with new arrangements for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the English regions, Parliament and Local Authorities."

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair 1999.

However, modernisation was seen to go far beyond this and needed to consider how the Government itself worked. There was an inherent need to reform for the future with a clearly defined statement of the role of Government:

"It is a clear statement by the Government of what government is for. Not government for those who work in Government; but government for people, people as consumers, people as citizens"

Minister of the Cabinet Office, Jack Cunningham 1999.

In line with this overarching programme of modernisation was the drive to make life better for people and businesses through a long-term programme of improvement.

Electronic Government, more commonly referred to as e-Government, was seen as an integral part of Local Government Modernisation. e-Government involved using the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an enabler to help transform the accessibility, quality and cost-effectiveness of public services, built around the needs of the citizen and customer.

The Manifesto of 1997 set out the party's aspirations for more than one term. The target set for e-Government services to be available online was 2008. The 2001 manifesto continued to the same date but as a result of lobbying, this date was brought forward to 2005. However, the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) did not endorse this. The NAW and Local Government in Wales had jointly committed themselves to implement a strategy for improving service delivery using ICT based on the identification and addressing of local issues and priorities. Common themes and priorities across Wales and the development of national and local targets for future years would be independently determined. As such, e-Government in Wales was part of a broad agenda for change encapsulated in the Improvement Agenda driven by the Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI).

To ensure that Local Government would be both inclusive and integrated, there were three basic aims for the Modernisation Agenda, which all Councils were to be mindful of:

- to ensure that policy making and decisions are more strategic and joined up both internally within Directorates and externally with its partners
- to ensure that public service users not providers are the focus, by matching services more closely to people's day-to-day lives
- to deliver public services that are high quality and efficient.

Flintshire County Council's interim *'Implementing Electronic Government'* (IEG1) Statement for 2002/2003 set out the Council's vision for e-Government, the milestones for implementation and the management arrangements for delivery. With ICT as a key enabler, the challenge of e-Government called for the willingness to provide services around the customer's needs, rather than those of the organisation. That is, **"at a time, location and in a manner suitable for the customer, and not necessarily as the Council is used to"** and it was clear therefore, that e-Government would have far-reaching implications for the Authority.

The detailed IEG2 Statement for 2003/2004 was Flintshire's submission to the NAW, produced within a common framework and to an agreed direction. The joint statement produced by the six North Wales Authorities highlighted the level of agreement and co-operation on key issues and themes. Local content added value and was an integral part of the setting of priorities based on the risk assessments under the WPI.

A Whole Authority Analysis (WAA) and Joint Risk Assessment were carried out by the Council as part of the first year of the WPI. The outcomes identified ten themes within three main categories to be known as the *'Big 10'* Corporate Objectives in the Council's 2002/03 Improvement Plan. Access To Services (A2S) was one of these Corporate Objectives. Forty-one significant Service improvements were also identified, many of which needed to be considered alongside the County's e-Government strategy.

Within the drive to improve service delivery, the A2S Review was identified as one of two cross-cutting Reviews for 2002/2003 to be undertaken by the County. It was to be cross-cutting in that the Review would consider all internal Directorates/Services, external partners and stakeholders in any decisions that were made. In selecting A2S, a key priority objective for 2002 and beyond was:

‘Providing improved access to, and efficiency of, all Local Authority services.’

External drivers included:

- e-Government guidelines and targets from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)
- the social inclusion and equalities agendas – to ensure information and services are accessible to all areas of the community
- the general drive for more citizen-focused, joined-up and accessible services.

This Review was to examine the effectiveness of all the main channels through which the Council interacted with its customers, to include telephone, personal visits to Council premises, home visits, written correspondence, e-mail and the Council’s website. Discussions had taken place whilst initially scoping the Review and the following proposals were included:

- a review of the main communication and service delivery channels between the Council and its customers to include telephone, counter and reception services and written communication
- a review of current practices in relation to customer care, service standards and complaint handling to establish a common approach across the Council
- identify of how the public of Flintshire wishes to interact with the Council and the demand for new electronic channels of service and information provision
- to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of existing service delivery points and how they could be better configured to provide improved one-stop access for citizens and ensure inclusivity

- to review current information and systems to ensure delivery of citizen-focused joined-up information and services. It was proposed that this work initially would concentrate on the Council and its Directorates, with the intention of extending it to encompass partner agencies and organisations in the future.

1.2 Flintshire County Council's 'Virtual' Contact Centre (VCC)

The consultation carried out to date (to be discussed in Chapter 4) provided a clear view of the priorities that the Review needed to address, from both an internal and external perspectives. The Council's Executive (Cabinet), who were responsible for making decisions within the Council's constitutional framework, had approved in the short term, that the Review should concentrate on five priority areas. Whilst this initial scope would only address these key short-term priorities, it would invariably cover a wide range of potential improvements and address considerable issues along the way.

1. How Flintshire County Council can improve its performance of handling telephone contact
2. To consider piloting Call Centre/One-Stop-Shop type working over a range of services in five different locations – a 'virtual' solution
3. A new version of the Flintshire website to be launched to provide a range of on-line services
4. Develop a consistent set of customer service standards and policies across the Council, incorporating existing best practice
5. Commission a programme of customer care/awareness training.

For the purposes of the intended dissertation and to ensure that the study is rigorous, the decision was taken to focus on the VCC. This would discuss and debate if and how improved access via this technology could realise and contribute to improved service delivery and customer satisfaction.

The piloting of a Call Centre/One-Stop-Shop type working (to be discussed in Chapter 4) was to utilise an in-house developed computer system. Whilst not a Call

Centre in the ‘traditional’ sense, this solution was seen as having the potential to offer a ‘virtual’ solution, which would allow the citizens to log requests for County information and services from a number of differing physical locations.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is that improved access to services by means of a ‘Virtual’ Contact Centre actually improves service delivery.

Whilst the deployment of the VCC would offer the customers of Flintshire County Council a choice of access channels, it would not necessarily follow that there would be an improvement in the actual service that they would ultimately receive.

A number of key questions needed to be addressed including:

- what would be the benefits to the citizen and the Council in deploying this contact solution?
- how would improvement be monitored and measured?
- how would the Council address the issues that would inevitably arise?
- how would the staff, members and partners adopt to changes in working practices and culture?

1.4 Rationale for the Research

Two key elements in managing the Council’s relationship with its citizens were the efficient handling and complete tracking of the individual’s interactions with the Council. These contacts may be via multiple channels such as over the telephone, in person or via the website. The rationale for introducing a comprehensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is that it would allow such interactions to be recorded and allow individual Councils to monitor the resolution of issues raised. The implementation of CRM could be a major and costly undertaking and for Flintshire County Council, any decision taken to deploy such a solution would be subject to a rigorous Options Appraisal.

The principle of a Contact Centre was that incoming communications primarily by telephone calls, mail, faxes and electronic based communications such as e-mails and e-Forms were handled through a single point of contact. There were two principal types of Contact Centre: the 'Central' and the 'Virtual' (refer to 1.7). The 'Virtual' Contact Centre was often the preferred solution for many Authorities, where the customer contact staff were situated across the organisation or regions and had the advantage of retaining customer expertise locally.

An understanding of why Local Authorities develop communication solutions, such as Call or Contact Centres was needed before describing their development process. The strategic thinking behind such a development had been identified in two ways:

- as a tool to enable and embody radical culture change where existing service delivery mechanisms are not meeting customer needs
- a way of pooling resources to produce a better level of service.

A key number of considerations needed to be investigated such as the external drivers, the benefits for the Authority, accessibility issues, the benefits for the citizen, consultation and the constraints.

The foundation of this research was to ascertain how Contact Centre deployment had been documented in the literature, and to compare and debate the approaches that Flintshire had taken to date in its commitment to offering choice of access and improved customer services. A synthesis of options for the way forward would be offered based on the analysis and conclusion drawn from the study.

1.5 Personal Motivation

A personal interest in the more strategic challenges of the Government's e-Government Agenda brought about the desire to move from my role as a Project Leader within Information Systems Development at Flintshire County Council. On

successfully attaining the position of the e-Government Manager for the County in November 2002, the Review was just about to begin with a Staged Inspection (to be discussed in Chapter 4).

It was the role and responsibility of the e-Government Manager to 'project manage' the Review for the short-term priority areas. The role was to be very challenging and forward-thinking and the outcomes of the Review would bring about major changes in the way that the Authority's services were delivered to the citizens, customers and partners of Flintshire County Council.

Whilst there was no doubt of the Council's commitment to the vision of e-Government, it was thought that it would be particularly interesting to determine if the aspirations of improved service delivery and customer satisfaction could actually be realised through the offerings of a variety of access channels via the in-house contact solution.

1.6 Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 1 discusses the external and internal drivers, the rationale and the personal motivation behind the research to be undertaken into Contact Centre deployment, as part of the A2S Review within Flintshire County Council.

Chapter 2 discusses and justifies the 'mix' of research methodologies adopted for this study.

Chapter 3 undertakes a detailed literature review around six defined themes relating to the topic of study and summaries the conclusions and issues pertaining to the research question.

Chapter 4 discusses the Flintshire 'Pilot' Case Study and the various Stages (preparation, consultation, process and findings) undertaken in the deployment of the VCC solution as part the A2S Review.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the analysis and draws conclusions relevant to the hypothesis under the identified themes. The chapter considers the limitations of the study and synthesises on the way forward for customer access to services at Flintshire County Council.

Chapter 6 offers a critical reflection on the Case Study research undertaking.

1.7 Definitions

Call Centre

A generic term used to describe customer service centres and help desks. A Call Centre provides a single telephone contact point (or a limited number of contact points) for users of an organisation to have enquiries of any nature resolved quickly.

Contact Centre

Contact Centres extend the one-stop call-centre approach beyond telephone calls where staff can deal with e-mail, faxes, text messages, video messages and telephone messages. A Contact Centre could be deployed at various locations and via a variety of access channels.

'Virtual' Contact Centre (VCC)

The VCC uses computer networks to allow staff working in many locations to offer citizens the appearance of being served from a single central location. In fact, the VCC could be deployed via a variety of access channels (e.g. website, kiosk, counter service) with the calls and enquiries handled by staff based at different locations (library, cash office, mobile office).

Electronic Government (e-Government)

e-Government is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve the activities of public sector organisations.

Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI)

The Wales Programme for Improvement provides a radical new approach to the achievement of the delivery of high quality services to the public which meet their identified needs.

Whole Authority Analysis (WAA)

The Whole Authority Analysis is the starting point for the WPI. It requires an in-depth assessment by each Local Authority of its own fitness to achieve continuous improvement across both corporate and service functions. The analysis should be carried out every five years.

Joint Risk Assessment

The Joint Risk Assessment is carried out by the Authority in partnership with its' external regulators. It identifies those services considered to be most at risk and helps to investigate remedial action. The assessment is carried out annually.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the Central Government drivers against which Flintshire County Council undertook the A2S Review, to determine how it was best placed to improve access to its services and ultimately, improve the quality and satisfaction of the service delivery to its citizens and customers. The deployment of a Call or Contact Centre formed an integral part of delivering e-Government and the WPI for many Authorities and was the focal point of discussion in this research study.

Chapter 2 will discuss the chosen methodology for the research and justify why a 'mixed' approach of biographical exploratory (pilot) Case Study and action learning was deemed to be appropriate by the researcher. The procedures undertaken to collate supporting data to the hypothesis question to be answered are discussed.

2.2 Alternative Research Methodologies

Firstly, consideration was given whether to undertake a 'quantitative' or 'qualitative' approach to the research. Trochim, W.M. (1999) in his on-line 'Knowledgebase' makes the point that for two reasons, there was little difference between the approaches:

- all research is quantitative because anything can be counted - even purely verbal responses, perhaps after sorting comments into similar groups
- all research is qualitative because answers to even the firmest numeric questions may conceal a variety of meanings.

He stated that the real difference between quantitative and qualitative was not so much the method, but the researcher's approach. Secondly, a number of academic research methodologies were examined for their appropriateness to the research

hypothesis in question (Trochim, W.M. (1999) Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods).

Participatory Research: This is the study of one's own practice (Zeichner, Carr & Kemmis, 1992). The primary outcome is change in the lived experience of those involved in the inquiry. Participants are empowered to define their world in the service of what they see as worthwhile interests and as a consequence they change their world in significant ways (Reason, 1994).

Ethnography: The long-term investigation of a group (often a culture) or shared meaning of a group. There is a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena with a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data and investigating a small number of cases. Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Naturalistic Inquiry: The study of cases that are naturally bounded. Grounded theory is a form of understanding, an observation. The realities are multiple, constructed and holistic. The knower and known are interactive and inseparable. Only time and context-bound working hypotheses are possible. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects. Inquiry is value-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Participatory method was not deemed appropriate, as it seemed to have a too narrow focus. This study would affect not only those involved in the inquiry but all staff, customers and stakeholders of the Council. It was felt that Ethnography, whilst considered to be useful for the cultural elements did not fit well with a single pilot Case Study, where the data would, in the main be 'structured'. For Naturalistic Inquiry, this method implied the study of a number of naturally bounded theoretical cases where the researcher took an observer role. In this study, the researcher was

a major player, almost the leader of a 'live' pilot study, so the Naturalistic Inquiry method was not considered. It was felt that a 'mixed' approach of Case Study, Biographical and Action Learning was the most appropriate, as discussed below.

2.3 The Case Study Methodology

Case Study research excels at bringing about an understanding of a complex issue or situation and a detailed analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationship. It can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research undertakings. Researchers have used the Case Study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines.

Many well-known Case Study researchers such as Robert E. Stake, Helen Simons, and Robert K. Yin had written about Case Study research and suggested techniques for organising and conducting the research successfully. Many research undertakings have drawn upon their work and documented the technique of a six-step approach that should be used. The researchers used this concept as a template for the design of the research study as follows:

- determined and defined the research questions
- selected the cases and determined data gathering and analysis techniques
- prepared to collect the data
- collected data in the field
- evaluated and analysed the data
- prepared the report.

Researcher Robert K. Yin defined the Case Study research method as *“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”* (Yin, R.K. 1984, p.23). He commented that *“as the exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or ‘case’ occurs over a period of time, the Case Study methodology involved the collation of in-depth data from multiple sources rich in information”*. This method was also a non-experimental,

descriptive type of study and involved the creation of an in-depth descriptive record, kept by an outside observer, or an individual or group of individuals.

It was suggested that the purpose of Case Study was not to represent the world, but to represent the case. The usefulness of such a method to practitioners and policy makers was in itself an extension of experience. The methods of Qualitative Case Study were largely the methods of disciplining personal and particularised experience. (Stake, 1994)

As Casey & Stake (1994) stated, a 'biographical' approach to this method would consider the inclusion of oral history, historical analysis and biography i.e. an extended exploration of a life experience in retrospect. Typical data collected might include biographical data, consultation results, family history, observations, interviews, and the results of various psychological tests.

Under the more generalised category of Case Study there existed several subdivisions, each of which could be custom selected for use depending upon the goals and objectives of the researcher. These divisions included the following, with the exploratory (pilot) approach selected by the researcher for this particular research study.

- Illustrative Case Study
- Exploratory (or pilot) Case Study
- Cumulative Case Study
- Critical Instance Case Study.

The Exploratory (or pilot) Case Study is a condensed Case Study performed before implementing a large-scale initiative or investigation. The basic function was to help identify questions and select types of measurement. However, there was a danger that the initial findings may seem convincing enough to be released prematurely, as conclusions.

2.4 The Action Learning Methodology

Dick, B. (2002) described action research as a natural way of acting and researching at the same time. With the exception of well-practised tasks, there is a natural rhythm to the way most individuals behave. They do something and then check if it worked as expected. If it didn't, they analyse what happened and what they might do differently. If necessary, the process is repeated.

act -> review -> act -> review

Dick stated this is the natural cycle which action research uses to achieve its twin outcomes of action (e.g. change) and research (e.g. understanding). You might say that action research is true to its label - it is action and research:

action research = action and research

This flexible spiral process allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time. The understanding allows more informed change and at the same time is informed by that change. People affected by the change are usually involved in the action research, so this allows the understanding to be widely shared, changed and pursued with commitment.

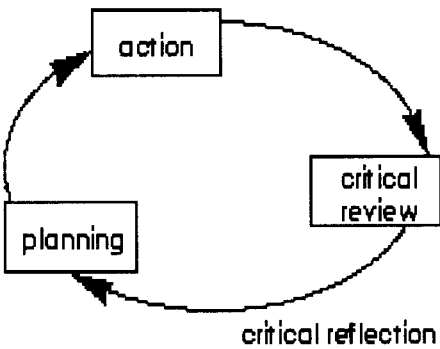


Figure 2.1. The Action Research Spiral

2.5 Justification of a 'Mixed' Approach

The methodology adopted for this research was a Biographical Case Study of the exploratory (or pilot) type, supported by Action Learning and Action Research. This

'mixed' approach suited this research study, as the deployment of a VCC at Flintshire (discussed in Chapter 1) was in itself a pilot study within the A2S Review. By testing the VCC concept, Flintshire County Council had the means of assessing its suitability, appropriateness and effectiveness as a mechanism to deliver improved services to the customer. By involving all levels of staff and stakeholders throughout the Review, the Case Study approach would be particularly useful to get a detailed contextual view of individual's experiences of service delivery and contacting customers.

However, there were limitations to using the Case Study method that the researcher needed to take account of. It can involve only a limited amount of individuals and therefore may not be representative of the general group or population. Case Studies often rely on descriptive information provided by different people and important details may often be overlooked or left out (Stake 1994). Also, as the biographical approach was to be undertaken, then much of the information collected would be retrospective data, recollections of past events, and therefore subject to the problems inherent to memory.

Action Learning allowed the participants in the Review to learn from the Case Study. The research was cyclic or spiral, alternating between action and critical reflection as it moved forward through the study. This reflection began with a critical review of the situation and past actions and was followed by informed planning of the next action. This approach was well suited to the A2S Review Staged inspection being undertaken. Participants were able to build on experiences gleaned during the pilot and adjust the plans accordingly. The result was a very flexible and responsive process with the people affected by the change being involved in the action and the critical reflection. Understanding was widely shared, and so too, the commitment to any planned change. This process was well suited to situations where there was a wish to achieve change (the 'action') and understanding (the 'research') at the same time.

2.6 Research Procedures

a. Determine the Scope of the Review and Define the Research Question

The first step in the research was to establish a firm focus and not to set a scope that was far too wide and unachievable within the timescale. Political, social, historical, and personal issues would provide wide-ranging possibilities for questions and add complexity to the Case Study. A variety of data gathering methods would be considered to produce evidence that would lead to understanding the case and answering the research question.

b. Literature Review

To assist in targeting and formulating the hypothesis question, the researcher conducted a literature review to establish what research had previously been conducted and to form the 'themes' for discussion around the hypothesis to be studied.

c. Select the Case Study and Determine the Data Gathering and Analysis Techniques

During the design phase the researcher selected a single real-life pilot Case Study currently being undertaken within the work environment (discussed in Chapter 4) in which she was personally involved and as such was well suited to the 'biographical' type. The Case Study method involved using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. Statistical data was collated from the VCC system to look at the number of contacts by the customers and at the average response times to those contacts.

Through the use of consultation and interview, the researcher was able to gather evidence to investigate and analyse in order to answer the research question (will be discussed in Chapters 4 & 5). The data collated from consultation, interview and workshops (Appendix A and B) would be, where practicable, in a consistent and a comparable format. This would support comparative analysis, so that converging lines of inquiry and patterns could be uncovered.

d. Evaluate and Analyse the Data

The data was examined and interpreted in order to find linkages between the research object and the outcomes with reference to the original research questions. Throughout the evaluation and analysis process new opportunities and insights were documented, in order to strengthen the research findings and conclusions, and contributed to any future recommendations (refer to Chapter 5). Regular review meetings with all stakeholders, feedback and performance information continued to inform the research, verified key observations and checked fact.

e. Summary

Through the use of the Biographical Case Study method and Action Learning, the action throughout the Review would be followed by critical reflection:

What worked? What didn't? What have we learned? How might we do it differently next time?

Reflection would be followed by action. The understanding achieved, the conclusions drawn, the action plans developed and tested in action hence the conclusions drawn by the researcher (refer to Chapter 5).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the Government Modernisation Agenda and the drivers to improve access to Council services to be discussed in this study. Chapter 2 continued by detailing the researcher's chosen methodology to be applied. Chapter 3 will relate the findings from the literature review undertaken within five identified themes. These themes, whilst not an exhaustive list, were deemed by the researcher to be those most pertinent to the focus of this research study.

For the success of any project there must be the drive and commitment by all involved and ownership at the highest level from within the organisation. It is of paramount importance that the project drivers are known and understood at the outset, so that all involved, at all levels, have a clear drive to the ultimate goal and objectives of that project. The inherent benefits that can be achieved need to be clearly stated and the issues understood. There must be willingness by all to address those issues as they arise and to be mindful that, for any implementation of a new way of working, there will always be a degree of change, both in working practices and the culture of the organisation. As such, it was important to understand and learn from experiences of others in the areas to be discussed and analysed in the study.

3.2 Review Themes

3.2.1 Determining the Drivers

In recent years, particularly since the e-Government Agenda formulated a direction and vision for the transformation of 'service delivery', there had been an increasing demand on the Local Authority to review the way that the local services were delivered to its citizens and customers. Priorities had been set, with action plans created to implement this transformation through Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) or e-service, as it was often known. This increased demand had occurred in a

response to the Improvement Agenda, e-Government targets, customer expectations and demands, examples being set by other Authorities and the advancing developments in ICT, which was seen very much as an enabler to the vision. An Employers' Organisation/Improvement and Development Agency (EOI/IDea) Project (2000) stated in its report 'Call and Contact Centres in Local Government – Getting It Right', that strategic thinking behind the development of a Contact Centre or Call Centre had been identified as:

- a tool to enable and embody radical culture change where existing service delivery mechanisms were not meeting customer needs
- a means of pooling resources to produce a better level of service

The provision of service delivery to the customer needed to be in a far more efficient and effective manner than had been done in the past. Katner (1990) argued that successful organisations were characterised by their ability to be 'fast', 'friendly' and 'flexible'. Milner (2002) stated that it is likely that Katner's views of best practice had not been substantially informed by observations of such traits in the public services. By their very nature, public services had been viewed as being inward facing, over bureaucratic, focused rather more on procedure than delivery and not predisposed to speed of delivery.

To assist in driving the Modernisation Agenda forward, the Council needed to understand why Local Authorities should develop alternative communication solutions, such as Call and Contact Centres and how they would carry out the development and implementation. Surveys undertaken around the time of the publication of the Modernising Agenda found that more than 100 Local Authorities were planning to implement some form of call/contact technology (Oakwood Consulting, Sept 1999), whilst others were discussing and evaluating the options.

With the 2005 e-Government target deadline set for English Authorities to deliver 100% of their services electronically, the use of Call and Contact Centres was expected to grow within Local Government and beyond. Kuk (2002) quoted a recent benchmarking study that suggested countries with a high level of electronic service

(e-service) take-up, tended to offer more user-centric services and prioritised in accordance with feasibility of delivery and usefulness to the citizen. He further stated that the UK English target would only limit the scope of flexibility. A far better approach would be to avoid setting unrealistic targets and to provide a support structure that aided the investment decision. By doing so, the Authorities would be able to consider what level of take-up is sought, in what timescales and how it would be achieved.

This more pragmatic approach was being adopted in Wales, where the decision not to adopt the December 2005 target was based on the premise that targets for e-Government should clearly relate to overall priorities for public service delivery and individual Local Authorities. The National Assembly for Wales (NAW) had expressed concern that there was a risk that local public services in Wales would fail to keep pace with people's expectations of being able to do business electronically, if such deadlines were imposed.

Consultation undertaken within Flintshire (to be discussed in Chapter 4) had highlighted customer access preferences and their willingness to accept the new offerings being made possible by technology improvements. It was envisaged that the development of this alternative method of contact (the VCC), would be made available via a select range of access channels including the telephone, e-mail, the internet, and from various locations such as the libraries and community centres. This would make inroads in addressing the problems that customers may have had in the past, and in turn, enhance the 'customer experience' when contacting the Council.

3.2.2 Assessing the Benefits

Whilst the drivers are clearly defined within the e-Government Modernisation Agenda, further weight could be added to the debate by considering the documented benefits that could be realised by an organisation in implementing a call or contact style of working.

Milner (2002) commented that - *“there is no universally agreed ‘recipe’ for the way in which public services may need to rethink their rationale, but that globally accepted practice suggests that four key strands are followed to deliver clear benefits for the customer”*

- *the intention to transform the citizen experience to bring about a more coherent approach to accessing services – ensuring an on-going focus on usability*
- *to enhance the potential for communication, consultation and engagement, both internally and externally*
- *to ensure key ‘back-office’ functions operate in an open environment such that information can flow seamlessly and invisibly across service boundaries*
- *where partner organisations are tasked with assisting the service delivery, that sufficient structures are in place to ensure operational knowledge and learning fundamental to the Authorities policy formulation are not lost from the public service ‘loop’ entirely.*

The Central IT Unit (CITU) stated that the benefits from the development of a Call or Contact Centre could be realised both internally and externally, as well as there being strong operational benefits from the way an Authority handled accessibility from various aspects, such as the telephone, opening hours and equality (Cabinet Office/CITU 2000).

For the citizens, the Contact Centre would act as a channel between themselves and the services they require. The accessibility to the centre itself, supported by staff devoted to handling requests and queries, would help to improve the public perception of the Authority through the provision of a seamless and efficient service.

In 2002, the Foundation for Information Technology in Local Government (FITLOG) commented that for a Contact Centre to be effective in its undertaking, the input channels e.g. telephone, Contact Centre front-end, the website, e-mail etc, must be supported by technology such as data capture and retrieval systems. These databases must encompass all services of the Council and it would be paramount to

the success that existing systems delivering these services at the Contact Centre front-end were capable of integrating to the back-office systems and vice versa.

They also noted that Government, both nationally and locally, had made significant investments in terms of resources, staffing and technology to drive the vision of e-Government through ESD. Technology itself was changing. Authorities that had invested in modern telephone technology were reaping the benefits, as most modern systems had elements of call-centre functionality, such as call management and routing (Automatic Call Distribution - ACD).

However, Buckley (2003) reminded us *“Governments do not envisage e-Government as replacing, but supplementing existing services”*. He discussed an unexpected benefit of services being forced to be more transparent and links being made more visible to the user, through the very nature of the electronic provision. The benefits of openness and linking could in return improve on the quality of service for the citizens using traditional interfaces.

3.2.3 Understanding the Issues

It is apparent from the literature that, aside from some of the benefits discussed, there were many issues and constraints a Local Authority would need to think about and address before undertaking a Call or Contact Centre venture. Whilst the list below is not exhaustive, it highlighted some of the fundamental considerations to be discussed within the scope of this research:

- staffing related issues
- systems and technologies
- accessibility issues e.g. hours of opening, hard to reach groups.

Change in culture and working practice and how to monitor and measure if there had been improvements in the services delivery are two points discussed later in the chapter.

Staffing Related Issues

It was becoming clear around the time of the millennium that the 'traditional' Call Centre was in no way a simple technological fix for improving citizens' access and customer services. FITLOG (2000) reported that Call Centre projects were stretching change management skills and resources. Staffing was one of the most contentious issues that faced Councils, in that at the very least it challenged the traditional way of working and could threaten professional standards of service delivery. FITLOG further highlighted on-going concerns raised amongst staff and trade unions on the working standards and conditions. An earlier report by the Health and Safety Executive (1999) had launched an investigation into working conditions in Call Centres, as a result of these concerns.

A report by Income Data Services published in 2000 found that 4 out of 10 Call Centres faced a problem with staff turnover. However, on a more positive note, later research undertaken by the EOI/IDea Project (2002) identified examples of good employment practice within Local Authorities and that in contrast to the 20-22% turnover of commercial Call or Contact Centres, Local Authorities were experiencing a turnover as low as 2–8%. This was attributed to a wide variety of services provided, on-going training and where possible rotation of staff between the front and back office.

In order to implement the new multi-media Contact Centre, Chassey & Case (2003) discussed that *“new levels of skill are needed, and decisions must be made about the cost-effectiveness of retraining existing employees as opposed to recruiting new staff who already have the requisite skill”*.

Systems and Technologies

ESD is very much reliant on the systems and technologies that would underpin a Call or Contact Centre solution. Local Authorities deliver in excess of 750 services supported by both manual and electronic systems. How would the implementation of a Contact Centre type solution seamlessly link these systems and services together

to realise a step towards the ultimate, true Customer Relationship Management (CRM)? How would a new glossy front-end link seamlessly to the back-office? Would the current technologies be suited or adaptable to the demands placed on an Authority to offer these alternative access channels? More importantly, what were the customers' requirements?

Existing infrastructures would need to be assessed as to their capability and capacity to deliver and support changes in the way that the services and systems would be delivered in this seamless manner in the future.

More recently, the Hewson Group (2002) discussed a set of deliverables and techniques for better customer management, which should be considered when undertaking any strategy for improving service delivery to the customer. This suggested that seven headings underpinned this integrated approach:

- understanding the customer's requirements and preferences
- aligning the organisational capability to meet the identified requirements
- increasing the customer-orientation
- process assessment and re-design
- selecting appropriate technology solutions
- leveraging application and data integration service
- CRM deployment and implementation services.

Heeks and Davies (1999) argued in favour of this 'integrated approach' particularly in the use of ICT in public sector reform. Heeks and Bhatnager (1999) developed this further claiming, "*information systems are central to the process of re-inventing government*". That is to say, they defined information systems as including information, people, processes and management. However, Kaylor *et al*, (2001) stated that the real value of e-Government lies in "*the ability to force an agency to rethink, reorganise and streamline their delivery*". This is reminiscent of Hammer's exhortation (1990) that "*the power of modern IT should be used to radically re-design business processes in order to achieve dramatic improvement in performance*". To assume that existing processes could stay exactly as they were

would be a mistake and invariably result in the service delivery and quality *diminishing rather than improving*.

Accessibility

The EOI/IDea stated that there would be no point in determining the drivers, assessing the benefits, identifying issues and considering underpinning systems and technologies, if the users could not access the ensuing solution. As the Call or Contact Centre would become the conduit between the public and the Authorities, accessibility issues, both to the centre and the services must be addressed (EOI/IDea Project (2000)). The suggestion was that this may cover a wide spectrum, but if developed appropriately would address:

- greater speed of access via a widening choice of channels
- extended hours of availability
- centralised point of contact
- improved quality of access (e.g. disabled persons, language choice)
- better co-ordination between services
- reduced cost/quality enhancement.

Varying degrees of contact models have been cited in the literature from the upgraded switchboard and help-line to the fully-fledged corporate, single telephone number Call Centre. The Contact Centre approach placed customer service in smaller units, which could be deployed centrally, or 'virtually' across a network of physically different locations. MORI and the Henley Management Centre (1999) undertook research that determined citizens preferred to contact the Council by telephone, and in fact, this proved to be the most cost-effective method. Of some 4.6 million people surveyed, 94% cited a preference for the telephone over written correspondence.

A further study by the Municipal Journal (2000) reported the cost of a telephone contact to be £1.37 as opposed to written at £7.00 and 'face to face' at a staggering

£77.00. The earlier e-Government survey by MORI (2000) identified two main aspects of public service improvement that were needed:

- public access to Local Authorities at weekends and evenings
- the Council's ability to respond to an enquiry from the public.

However, this survey did go on to conclude that there was little demand for the 'round the clock' (24/7) service or specifically for service on a Sunday.

3.2.4 Working Practices and Culture Change

The implementation of call and Contact Centres through the use of ICT created a new 'shop window' into the Authorities and had, to varying degrees, required radical change in culture and working practices. The e-Government initiative had tasked Authorities to change, so it was generally acknowledged that new policies and procedures would need to be in place, and that consultation would be undertaken with all involved in the implementation e.g. unions, staff, and partners. Research had sought to find out how Authorities had managed this change and the consultation processes undertaken to identify examples of good practice. FITLOG (1998) discussed some specific 'changes' for consideration:

- structure – needed to reflect both the Authority and the public
- systems – should be the tools to support and deliver the business processes
- culture – by far the biggest change to be managed that must be driven and supported from the top of the organisation right down to the bottom.

They identified that any change must be well planned, with clear direction, good communication as widely as possible, and involving all staff and stakeholders. Buckley (2003) emphasised *"it is important to consider the internal environment and the likely degree of co-operation of the players in the internal system"*. There were those within organisations that saw technology as a 'threat' to *"potentially threaten the status quo such as challenging current management or organisational practices"*.

This was also borne out by Dunleavy and Margretts (2000), who made reference to the UK Benefit's Agency's *"astonishing reluctance to experiment with and learn about citizens' preferences and behaviours"*.

However, there were opportunities for existing staff roles to diversify. Chassey and Case (2003) commented that *" the roles of Contact Centre staff are being 'enhanced', as with each call they have to be aware of and even pre-empt individual customer requirements and respond to these appropriately, although they are not expected to exercise judgement over how to use the information at their disposal"*.

3.2.5 Assessing Success

Finally, the literature review considers assessing and measuring the success in the strive to improve seamless services delivery and improved satisfaction for the customer.

Why was it necessary to measure customer satisfaction? Local Authorities understand that it is up to them as service providers to meet the needs of the customers. Changing the way they work, think and adapt to deliver improved services to the customers must start at the very least with a clear understanding of those needs and no longer being arrogant in expecting them to fit in with and do business on the Authorities' terms. To be able to assess the success of the concept of a Contact Centre improving customer satisfaction, clear monitoring and performance mechanisms would need to be established.

Hill, Brierley and MacDougal (1999) described the Customer Satisfaction Measurement Process (see Figure 3.1.), which provided some clear steps that would need to be considered. These involved planning, varying methods of surveying and research, followed by analysis, feedback, action and update, in a clear path to establishing if objectives were being attained.



Figure 3.1. Customer Satisfaction Measurement Process

(Source: Hill. N, Brierley. J and MacDougall. R (1999)

To measure satisfaction, an organisation would need a clear definition of exactly what it was measuring, i.e. measure what matters to the customer. Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (1999) contend, *“Satisfaction is simple. If you get what you want, if your requirements are met, then you are satisfied”*. They also articulate *“Customer satisfaction is a measure of how your organisation’s ‘total product’ performs in relation to a set of customer requirements”*. This tells us that it is not an absolute concept, but a relative one. That is to say, relative to what the customer expected in the first place, being the ultimate objective. This meant coming to an understanding of what customers want, in particular, what they valued and the causes of customer satisfaction.

The National CRM Programme (2003) Business Case provided an initial model (Figure 3.2) for Councils to use, which covered the impact of access, the call experience, outcome and end-to-end times on customer satisfaction. Hypothesis, (a view of the intended future and the approaches that may achieve it) based on each of these were being developed, to determine the improvements of most value to the customer.

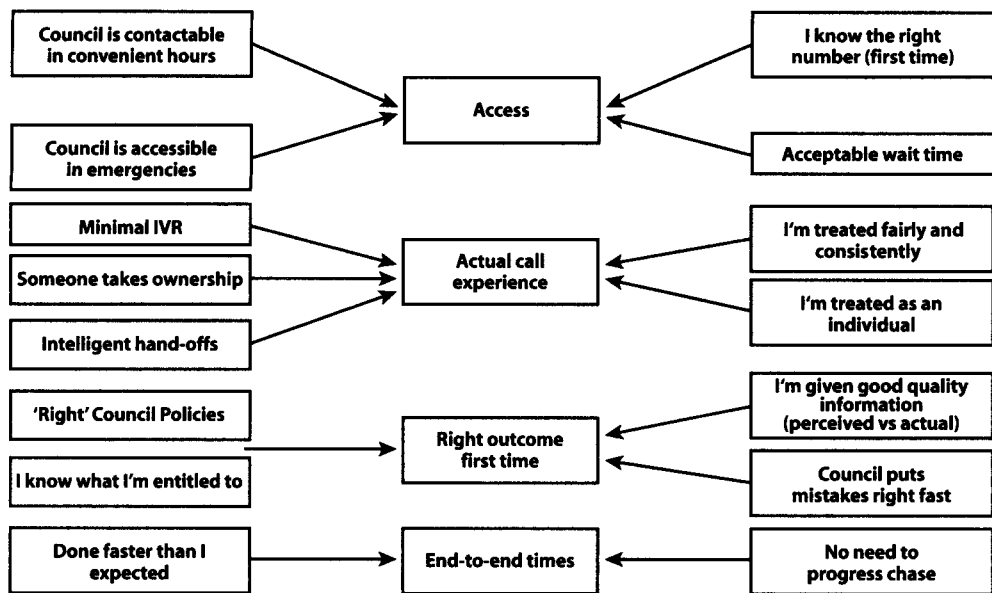


Figure 3.2. What Affects Customer Satisfaction

(Source: National CRM Programme Business Case)

In the debates on the usefulness of targets, standards and measures, the National CRM Programme Business Case discussed two very different ways in which similar targets function:

- for budgeting and stewardship – to enable operational costs and resources to be predicted and budgets to be built
- to focus and drive improvement – improvement targets set against measures of outcomes that matter to the customers and are used in the context of the method used e.g. Contact Centre

The case emphasised *“the measures that matter to customers tend to be end-to-end, crossing organisation and functional boundaries and at the basic level are to do with”*: (See figure 3.3).

- end-to-end time (e.g. how long did it take to repair the pothole?)
- the overall outcome (e.g. was the repair done well?)
- quality of experiences (e.g. were the staff helpful, did they tell me what I needed?).

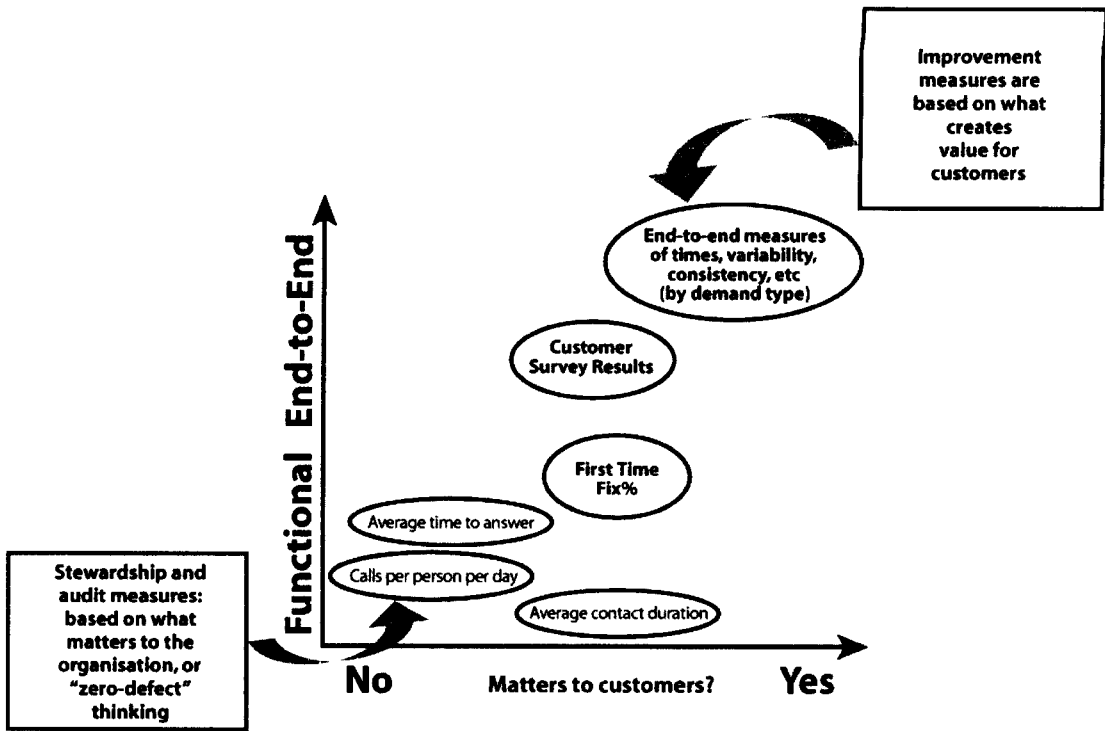


Figure 3.3. Service Improvement Targets

(Source: National CRM Programme Business Case)

The whole process of CSM was a lengthy chain of events, known in the literature as the Satisfaction Improvement Loop (Figure 3.4). Hill, Brierley and MacDougal described each of the steps in this loop as *“a potential hurdle at which the organisation’s satisfaction improvement programme could stumble”*. Much of this loop was concerned with feedback. This may be feedback from consultation, surveys or general communication, be it internal or to the customer. Feeding back results to employees would be important to the long-term success of a Call or Contact Centre programme. As Hill, Brierley and MacDougal note *“little action will be taken to improve customer satisfaction if employees don’t know enough about the results or their implications”*. For the customer, they highlighted three things at the least to be considered:

- which customers should receive feedback?
- what information would be provided?
- how will it be communicated?



Figure 3.4. The Satisfaction Improvement Loop

(Source: Hill. N, Brierley. J and MacDougal. R (1999))

In summary, service quality had been debated and researched over the past two decades with leading service quality measurement models being developed by Parasuraman *et al*, (1988, 1991) and Cronin and Taylor (1992). Buckley (2003) stated that such measurement in the public sector had been less well considered. Literature originated in the profit-orientated private sector, where both motivation and outcomes were more easily measured. Collins and Bulter (1995) concluded that *“the introduction of service quality rhetoric in the public sector is a more recent phenomenon that can be traced to the new public management movement”* of which e-Government is now a major player.

3.3 Summary

The researcher elicited the specific themes to be discussed in the literature review chapter. These were the drivers, benefits and issues, working practices and culture change, and assessing success.

It has been identified that the provision of service delivery to the customer needed to be in a far more efficient and effective manner than had been done in the past. The need to understand how the development of an alternative method of communication at a variety of service delivery points must be of the highest importance, before any levels of improvement in customer satisfaction can be realised.

In discussing the VCC project at Flintshire, it was noted that there was a need to be mindful of the experiences of others, and to address the issues and improvements that can be made to the existing solution, before any future implementation plans are set in place. The Authority must not lose sight of its vision to deliver its service ***"at a time, location and in a manner suitable for the customer, and not necessarily as the Council is used to"*** and to understand, that there are clear benefits to be achieved in doing so, both for the Council and the customer.

As noted in the discussions *"Governments do not envisage e-Government as replacing, but supplementing existing services"*, and as such, the VCC must be seen as a 'tool', supported by ICT as an enabler, in delivering improved quality of service and satisfaction for the citizens and customers of Flintshire. The literature emphasised the importance of establishing monitoring and performance mechanisms, to determine the success of the concept and to be able to make the necessary adjustments to build on that success.

The research has also stressed the importance of managing changes in working practice and culture, and some good examples of best practice have been cited. As noted, to address any changes within the Authority, particular attention must be paid to the impact areas of the structure, systems and the culture of the organisation.

Chapter 4

Case Study

4.1 Introduction

One of the Council's Corporate Priorities as identified in the Council's 2002/03 Improvement Plan was:

'Providing improved access to, and efficiency of, all Local Authority services.'

This objective was supported by a clear commitment to the:

'Establishment of a Flintshire Direct Call Centre and One-Stop Shops.'

By encouraging and facilitating joined-up partnership working between Central and Local Government and other Agencies, Flintshire County Council undertook to provide high quality modern and responsive services for the benefit of the citizen.

The Council had decided to review access to services because:

- consultation with its customers through a Citizens' Panel Survey had indicated a level of dissatisfaction with the way enquiries were dealt with by the Council, particularly via the telephone
- a more customer-focused approach was required, taking into account e-Government, social inclusion and equality strategies
- the Asset Management review would need to look at the Council's buildings to identify opportunities for changes in the way that the receptions and information services could be improved for the public.

The Access To Services (A2S) Review would examine the effectiveness of all the main channels through which the Council interacts with its customers. This included the telephone, personal visits to Council offices, home visits, written correspondence, e-mail and the Council's website. Hence, **'One Council, One Service'** became the branding under which Flintshire would take this vision forward.

(A2S Review Team/Board - 2003)

Figure 4.1. illustrates how the Council envisaged delivering such a vision.

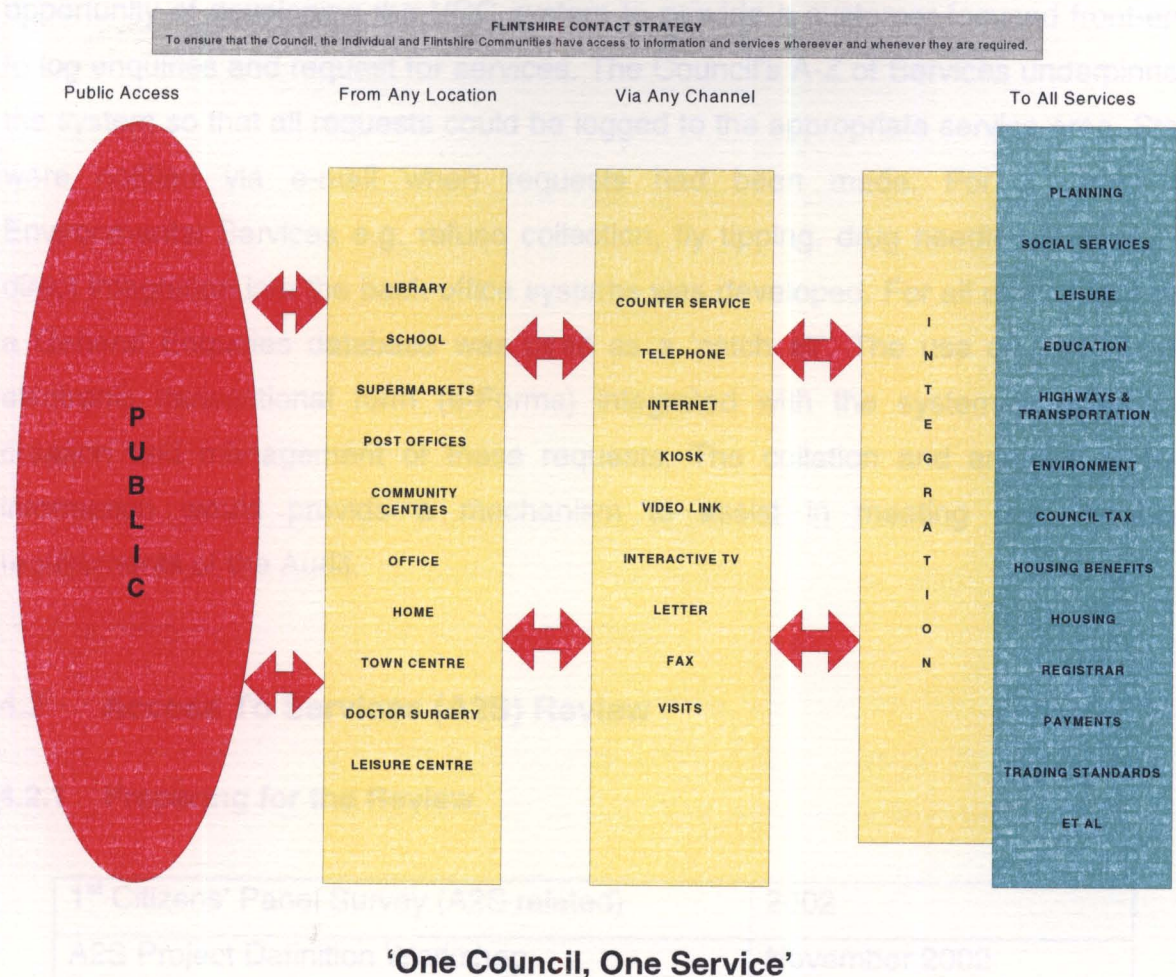


Figure 4.1. Flintshire's Contact Strategy Diagram

(Source: Flintshire County Council)

"This branding reflects the holistic approach to delivering improved joined-up services to our customers across the Council" (A2S Review Team/Board 2003)

The 'Virtual' Contact Centre (VCC) Solution

As part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, there was a requirement to collect information from many sources in order to develop action plans and strategies to combat crime and anti-social behaviour. Two Audits had taken place forming the basis of the three year strategies for 1998/2001 and 2002/2005. For Flintshire, as with many other Authorities, the Audits presented an issue, as no mechanism existed to capture and collate the information and data required.

During 2002, the Flintshire's Information Systems development team took the opportunity of developing the VCC system to provide a customer-focused front-end to log enquiries and request for services. The Council's A-Z of Services underpinned the system so that all requests could be logged to the appropriate service area. Staff were notified via e-mail when requests had been made. For a range of Environmental Services e.g. refuse collection, fly tipping, drug needles (sharps), a direct integration into the back-office systems was developed. For all other requests, a General Enquiries database was used as a 'catch all'. The use of a corporate electronic transactional form (e-Forms) integrated with the system enabled the creation and management of these requests. The collation and analysis of this information would provide a mechanism to assist in meeting the statistical requirements of the Audit.

4.2 Access To Services (A2S) Review

4.2.1 Preparing for the Review

1 st Citizens' Panel Survey (A2S related)	2002
A2S Project Definition Workshop	November 2002
Audit Commission Inspection: Stage 1	November 2002
Internal Consultation Workshop	December 2002
External Consultation Workshop	January 2003
Audit Commission Inspection: Stage 2	January 2003
2 nd Citizens Panel Survey (A2S related)	February 2003
Front-line Staff Consultation Workshop	March 2003
Directorate Workshop	March 2003
Audit Commission Stage 2 Final Report	July 2003
Contact Centre Improvement Workshops	August 2004
Analysis of Citizens' Panel Survey Results	September 2004
Contact Centre/Call Centre Option Appraisal	Scheduled October 2004
Audit Commission Stage 3 Inspection	Scheduled Spring 2005

Table 4.1. Access To Services (A2S) Review Timetable

Citizens' Panel

A Citizens Panel Survey was carried out early in 2002 to identify how customers contacted Flintshire County Council, their preferred method of contact and the demand for new channels, in particular by electronic means. It was the intention of the Council to revisit this line of consultation at various intervals, to ascertain if the work identified and progressed as a result of the Review, was having a marked effect on its customers' expectations and experiences.

A2S Project Definition Workshop

During November 2002, a Project Definition Workshop took place resulting in the creation of the Project Schedule for the whole Review and the individual Improvement Action Plans for the priority areas.

The main goal of the Review was **'to improve access to Flintshire County Council services'**. The Guiding Principles and Success Criteria Objectives for the A2S Review were set in place and agreed. The specific objectives for the VCC deployment were to:

- complete a review to identify potential for Contact Centres deployment
- identify how the service improvement could be measured and monitored
- identify and implement policies and standards to be deployed
- establish the current position of access to services before the VCC implementation i.e. a baseline.

It was noted that three outlets for the solution were already in place, namely the Website, the Mobile office and Library access.

The Flintshire website provided the customer with a self-serve means of logging enquiries and requests for service, as described earlier, either from the comfort of their own home or from wherever they were able to access the Internet. The Mobile Office, whilst providing the same logging service, did so with the assistance of the mobile office staff who would input the details into the system via a laptop computer. The vehicle visited pre-scheduled locations throughout the County on a rota basis. In

addition to this service, the on-board staff provided a variety of information pertaining to Flintshire County Council and its partner organisations in the form of leaflets and literature and also, where necessary, made calls back to the County Offices to resolve other customer requests.

The Library outlet was situated in the town of Buckley. The same assisted solution was offered on personal computers (PCs) located close to the library reception, with the staff on hand to assist the customer.

Some examples of areas that had been suggested at the workshop for future implementation included:

- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Flintshire Local Voluntary Committee (FLVC)
- Environmental Services
- Large employers
- Supermarkets
- 'Outreach' service to external locations such as Clubs and Societies
- Benefits Offices.

Two important areas were also cited at the workshop for future consideration:

- that the Review took account of equality and diversity issues e.g. language, age, geography, gender, disability and ethnicity.
- to define exactly who Flintshire believed their customers to be, e.g. citizens, residents, partner organisations, elected members, staff, businesses.

Finally, the workshop turned to the elements of risk. All risks identified during the Review were to be recorded in a risk/issue log (Appendix C) and would be reviewed during the regular Review Team meetings.

The Role of the Audit Commission

To facilitate the A2S Review the Council sought the assistance of the Audit Commission in the form of a Staged inspection, to ensure that the Review targeted the things that matter to local people and brought about significant improvements in services. The inspection would be delivered in three specifically defined Stages:

- Stage 1 - during the preparation for the Review
- Stage 2 - approximately mid-way through the Review, after information gathering and before improvement planning
- Stage 3 - an external inspection that integrates the evidence gathered at Stage 1 and Stage 2 and includes reality checks and performance assessment in order to arrive at the final judgments.

Stage 1 Inspection

The Stage 1 inspection started in November 2002 at the time that the Project Definition was defined. It challenged the Council's initial proposals and its mechanisms for ensuring that the A2S Review would improve the right things, at the right time and in the right manner. An important objective was to ensure that the Council focused on its customers taking into consideration the local circumstances.

Stage 1 challenged whether the Council had:

- undertaken appropriate research to inform the final scope and identify the key areas for significant improvement
- defined a realistic scope to reflect the local priorities and in doing so bring about significant improvements
- used the scope to define clear aims and objectives
- formed a Review Team that was best able to deliver the aims and objectives and provide a significant degree of challenge to existing arrangements
- formulated a detailed project plan with clear tasks and milestones.

4.2.2 Consultation

To ensure that the Review was totally cross-cutting and involving all stakeholders the Council decided to undertake a series of awareness and consultation sessions in the form of workshops. The outcomes from these workshops would inform and contribute to any future works undertaken during Stage 2.

Internal Consultation Workshop

The first workshop took place in December 2002 during Stage 1 of the inspection process involving officers from all Council services and a selective number of Members. The Consultation Workshop programme took the format of a number of presentations to raise the awareness of what A2S Review in Flintshire was all about and to highlight some equality issues, such as social inclusion, disability and the Welsh Language.

The Audit Commission Inspector presented an overview of the inspection process and detailed the four elements of Stage 1, i.e. the baseline information, scoping, resourcing and planning. Other presentations were given on the in-house developed VCC solution and the Flintshire Mobile Office facility.

The workshop session aimed to:

- identify strengths of access to services in Flintshire
- consider customer inaccessibility – what makes access difficult?
- determine best practice examples of accessible services
- consider the scope of the Review
- who and how should people be involved in the Review?
- what should be included in the scope?
- how do we communicate the findings?

Feedback from the day indicated that it had generally been very useful and interesting for those who attended. Comments and priorities collated during the

workshop (Appendix A) would be used to draft the scope of the Review, along with the Audit Commission Inspectors' findings at the end of this Stage.

Stage 1 Inspection Report

Following on from this interim consultation, the Audit Commission reported two main themes that the team had to address if the Review was to make an impact:

- being clear about the outcomes of the Review
- linking it with other initiatives across the Council into improvements in the quality of services.

At this Stage, early in January 2003, Flintshire's Leaders Strategy Group (LSG) and Executive both gave approval to the following recommendations:

- to hold a second Workshop with external stakeholders and partners with consideration to a further session for front-line staff
- to look at current partnership and future potential for joint working, e.g. Voluntary Sector, Children's Information Service, Health and other Local Authorities
- to involve all Directorates and a wide range of Officers and Members, in the scoping of this cross-cutting Review and to consult with a wide range of stakeholders and partners
- to establish an A2S Review Team with representation for all major front-line services.

When the scope and project plan were put in place the Audit Commission Inspectors would set a date to return for Stage 2, at which point three elements would to be considered:

- progress against aims to ensure that the Review is delivering against the original scope and project plan
- to identify problems and areas for improvement, analyse findings and an options appraisal

- Improvement planning, to identify targets, milestones, roles and responsibilities and resources, and to ensure that all is on track.

External Consultation Workshop

Late January 2003, the second awareness and consultation workshop focused on Flintshire's external stakeholders and partners. In total, 68 invitations were sent out to a wide range of organisations of which 20 were represented on the day. Following the same format as the internal consultation workshop, the external attendees were given sight of the detailed outcomes from that day for consideration and comparison against their own views and findings.

4.2.3 The Review in Progress

Stage 2 of the Inspection Process

The Review then moved into Stage 2 where information gathering and improvement planning would take place. For completeness, the third Consultation workshop involving the front-line staff considered the outcomes from the other workshops. Building on their personal experiences of dealing with the customers and citizens of Flintshire, the staff who attended were able to discuss and debate how they felt improving access would actually work for the Council and offer solutions and ideas for implementation.

Directorate Workshops

During the consultation Stage, Directorates had expressed concern that their particular access issues were not being addressed in the short-term and that the initial scope was too narrow. The decision to hold a series of Directorate workshops afforded the opportunity for such issues to be discussed and prioritised, however, always being mindful that the scope in the short-term had been agreed and accepted by the Executive and could not be changed.

The outcomes from each workshop were analysed and common issues and themes identified (Appendix B). This piece of work was to be presented to the Review Board with a view to establishing the way forward beyond Stage 3 and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

2nd Citizens' Panel

The decision was taken to undertake a 2nd Citizens' Panel questionnaire in February 2004, to include a number of areas relating to A2S, namely:

- Customer Care
- contacting the Council
- Council Website.

The results would be analysed and compared with those from the 1st Citizens Panel Survey and the collated outcomes from other consultation exercises. This information would complement work being undertaken by the Review Team in setting a baseline for monitoring and performance measurement for these areas and to inform any recommendations at Stage 3 of the Review.

Progress on the VCC Deployment

The Review Team had been tasked with the further deployment of the VCC solution to the two additional outlets as agreed and approved by the Project Board. These were to be the Housing Main Reception at Flint, as part of a delivery to a front-line office of a major Directorate and the use of 'Outreach' service delivery by the Mobile Office staff, to take the solution out to the hard-to-reach groups and customers. An Improvement Action Plan (Appendix D) detailed the requirements and tasks to ensure that outlets were in place by the March 2004 target date.

For the Flint Reception a photo launch and housing newsletter were created to promote the facility. For the 'Outreach', 3 pilot presentations were undertaken and 99 letters sent out to various groups (e.g. Pensioners' Clubs, Voluntary Groups) to promote and attract bookings. Further presentations were scheduled with the Community Councils to try to reach further groups. Local Councillors and all

Directorates within the Authority were made aware of the 'Outreach' activities. Both projects met their target date.

Audit Commission Stage 2 Report

The initial draft report was returned to the Inspectors with extensive comment from the Review Team and Flintshire Management. In the first instance it was generally felt that the draft report was very much 'doom and gloom' and had not highlighted any of the positive achievements of the Review to date. The final report was received in July 2004 and although still considered to be under-valuing the work undertaken to date, did reflect a more positive message.

Whilst the Inspectors were due to return for Stage 3 of the process in the Autumn, they decided to delay until Spring 2005. Some of the priority areas had not progressed at the same pace, as more time was needed on the preparatory work, especially for the telephone analysis and the Customer Care initiatives. However, for the VCC, the target had been achieved, but to ensure that the Audit Commission recommendations were considered, additional work on an Options Appraisal for future outlets and the way forward for the VCC was undertaken.

4.2.4 Local Empirical Findings

1st Citizens Panel

The results of the panel survey indicated that 90% of respondents preferred the telephone as the method of contact. This, followed by personal contact and written correspondence, remained the predominant ways the citizens wished to contact the Council, both now and in the future. However, there was a definite willingness and demand for electronic access particularly where they had access to the Internet at home. Another finding from the survey was a clear demand for extending opening hours, both at weekends and in the evening.

Findings from the Consultation Workshops

All of the Workshops were well received by the attendees who indicated that the days had been very useful and interesting. They welcomed the opportunity to discuss and debate the topics with other staff and stakeholders whom they would not normally have day-to-day contact with. This was very much in keeping with the vision of joined-up working that the Council was keen to promote.

Stage 1 Inspection Report findings

The Inspectors reported clearly defined aims and outcomes for the Review building on the vision for Flintshire's Contact Strategy:

- clarify the Council's expectations, particularly the balance between quick wins and longer-term changes
- help service staff arrive at a practical understanding of what excellent access means for their service
- keep staff informed of the progress of the Review, for example through briefings, e-mails, newsletters or bulletins
- seek regular feedback from front-line staff and customers, as their input is crucial
- monitor progress as a way of informing the on-going work of the Review Team and in particular, monitor the pilots that are already being established (Mobile Office and Environmental Services), as there would be lessons learnt, that could inform the whole Review.

(A2S Staged Inspection: Stage 1, Audit Commission in Wales – Dec. 2002)

The Inspectors also recommend that the role of the Review was clearly defined in relation to other Council initiatives and groups that may be working on transforming services delivery in parallel, such as the Human Resource Strategy, the e-Government Advisory Panel, the Customer Care Group and the Website Management Group (see Appendix E).

There was a collective requirement to:

- find ways of joining up the various service delivery initiatives being undertaken across the Council
- collaborate with partnerships that involve other service providers.

Consideration must also be given to setting in place on-going monitoring and performance measurement mechanisms.

The aim of both Workshops had been to identify current strengths in terms of accessing the Council, access barriers and some possible quick wins. Although there were many different views expressed, some common themes emerged which would be used to inform the scope and priority areas for review.

Strengths

- libraries – physical environment, opening hours, free internet access
- transport facilities – free for those over the age of 60, community transport, bus services
- commitment to partnership working
- website facilities (*potential*)
- area offices, local presence.

Barriers

- lack of single point of contact, multi-handling of calls, no-one takes ownership of problems
- lack of marketing of services
- resistance to change/silo mentality
- staff awareness/knowledge/skills in relation to customer service and Council services outside their remit
- inconsistent customer care standards, few service standards
- opening time constraints.

Quick Wins

- staff training
- Mobile Advice Centre/Mobile Office
- nominated customer focus staff in all directorates
- use leisure centres, libraries etc to take services to the community
- improved website
- improved marketing and information.

These findings along with those presented in the Audit Commission's Stage 1 Report, would be used to draft the final scope of the Review.

The VCC Statistics

As discussed, the solution was already deployed on the Website, the Mobile Office, and at a Library Reception. Statistical analysis undertaken during the Project Definition Stage showed that 1000 calls had been recorded via the VCC at these current locations, of which 681 had been captured by the Mobile Office. The 681 calls were further broken down with two main directorates taking the majority of the calls:

- Community & Housing - 303 calls
- Transport, Planning and Environment - 280 calls.

274 web site e-Forms had been submitted to date with the main Directorates being Transportation, Planning & Environment (TP&E), Education and Community & Housing.

Stage 2 Inspection Report Findings

Recommendations were made for each of the Review priorities. The key points raised in the report as a result of the consultation and interview outcomes around the VCC and its deployment methods were:

- the Mobile Office was a welcome addition bringing face-to-face access to Council services to remote parts of the County with limited public transport
- the current access points did not deal with requests themselves but channelled them to the appropriate department
- the lack of change in the way that requests are handled via the VCC meant that, though initial contact was improving, the user's experience of the quality of the service itself was not, and was not likely to lead to a substantial increase in satisfaction with services
- all staff needed a wide knowledge of Council departments and processes (because they all act as 'the front-line' in handling enquiries)
- beneath the present work, there was a crucial decision to be made about whether the Council opts for a specialised customer response team (using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology) or refined its present practices (the VCC approach).

(Source: Audit Commission Stage2 Report – July 2004)

The report also determined that the two main A2S issues for the Council were:

- the need for service delivery to match the potential improvements in the efficiency of contacting the Council
- the choice of a model for dealing with customers, whether primarily via the VCC or through the establishment of a one-stop-shop.

(Source: Audit Commission Stage2 Report- July 2004)

The Action Plan recommendations detailed below, aimed at ensuring the Review covered these two issues and also addressed the continuing development of access and the monitoring of performance and progress.

Stage 2 Action Plan Recommendations

- to avoid increasing levels of dissatisfaction amongst its customers, the Council must either, through this Review or otherwise, ensure that systems are in place to deliver effective responses to people's requests
- the Council must resolve the major issue of which model of A2S it will adopt before the Review is finished
- to provide the impetus for proper implementation of the Review's Action Plan, the Council must identify who has the Corporate lead role on A2S and charge that individual with both implementing the findings of the Review and continuing work on the wider issues
- the Review Team must monitor performance as a way of informing the on-going work of the Review Team; in particular, monitor the pilot initiatives that have already been introduced.

2nd Citizens' Panel Results

The results showed that:

- 64% felt that they were treated as a valued customer by Flintshire County Council
- contact by telephone was still the most favoured option but 23% said they would like to make contact via the internet
- of those customers contacting by telephone, 90% felt the speed of answering was good
- 99% said their preferred language when talking to the Council was English
- 83% felt the website design was "good"
- 79% felt the website was easy to use.

A number of themes emerged from analysis of the text feedback. In particular, the key points that the Review Team would be mindful of when making any future recommendations for the VCC were:

- issues with the offices not being open/accessible
- citizens not aware of contact facility/publicity
- opening hours, in general
- alternative locations/extending the solution.

VCC Data Analysis

Information and service requests logged by the system, as discussed previously were either for Environmental Services, where back-office integration had been developed or for all others, known as General Enquiries. Analysis of this data detailed the number of requests received at the various points of deployment (access channels) for each Service Directorates.

The average response times to those requests were also considered, but only for the General Enquiries, as there was no direct link from the integrated Environmental Systems back to the VCC front-end at this Stage. The analysis covered the available data from January 2003 to August 2004. The timelines for each of the individual access channels would vary, as the implementation dates were at different Stages of the Review.

This VCC analysis (see Tables 4.2 to 4.12) would assist the Review Team in identifying trends in the service usage, a range of potential issues to be addressed and areas of best practice. However, as the system was designed as a first point of contact for requests logging (i.e. a Contact Centre, as opposed to full Customer Relationship Management (CRM)), it was not clear at the onset as to whether it would provide evidence of improved customer satisfaction. The analysis and the points raised are discussed in Chapter 5.

VCC Analysis Charts

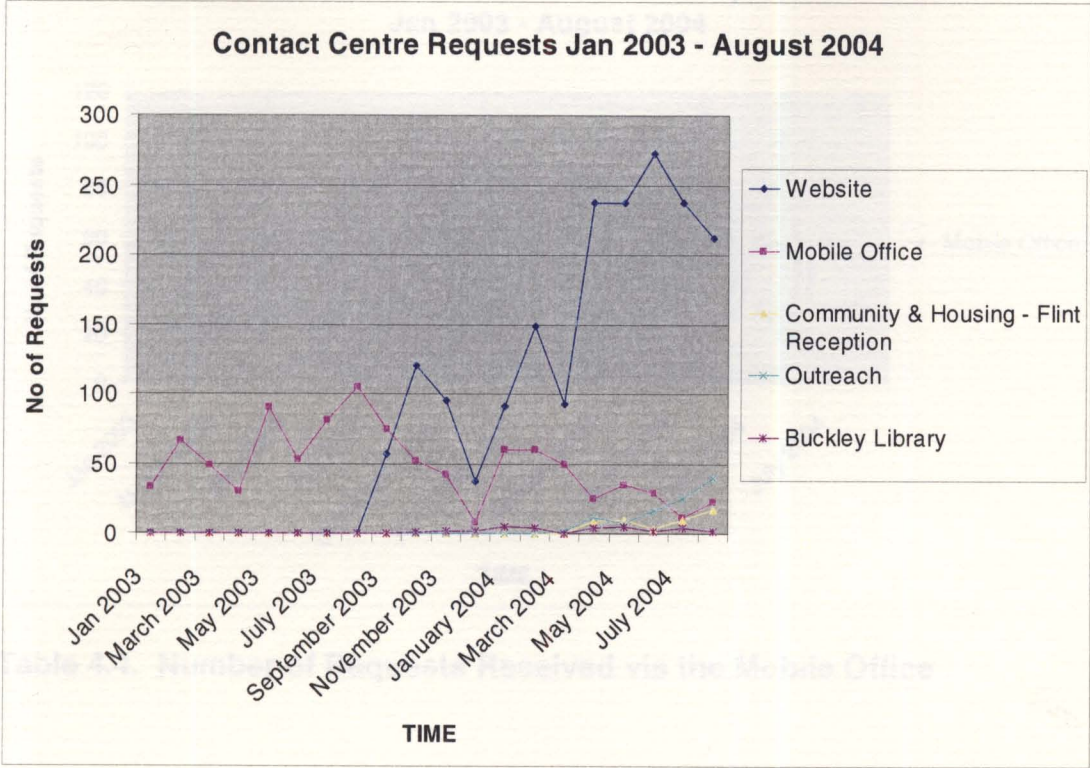


Table 4.2. Number of Requests Received via the 5 Access Channels

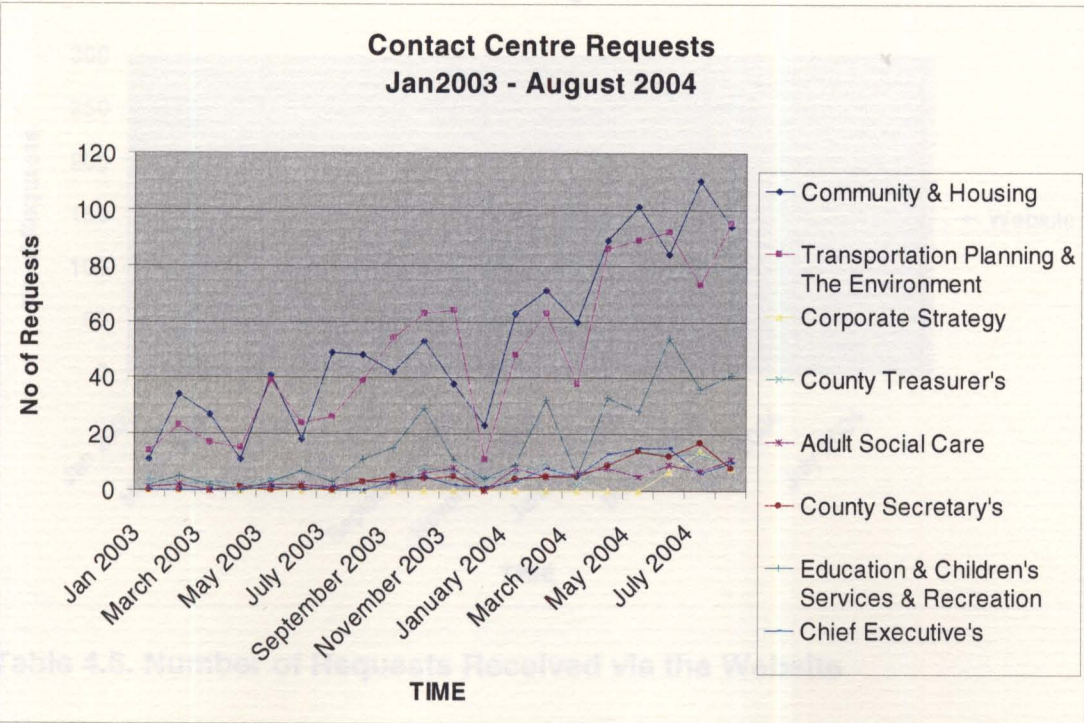


Table 4.3. Number of Requests Received Per Directorate

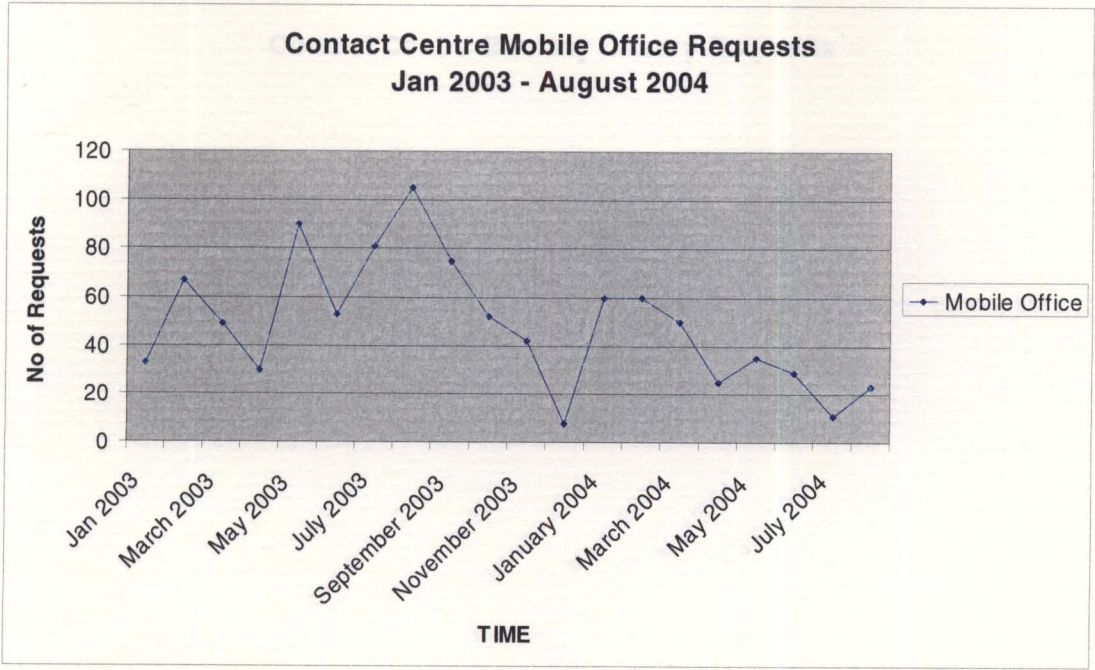


Table 4.4. Number of Requests Received via the Mobile Office

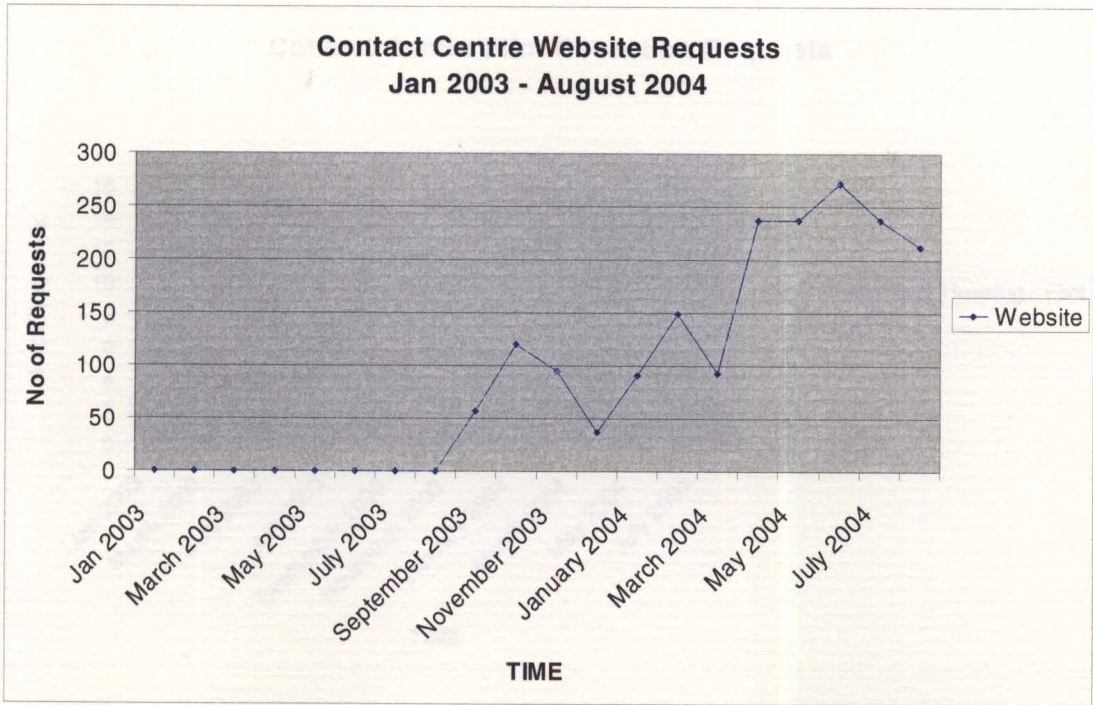


Table 4.5. Number of Requests Received via the Website

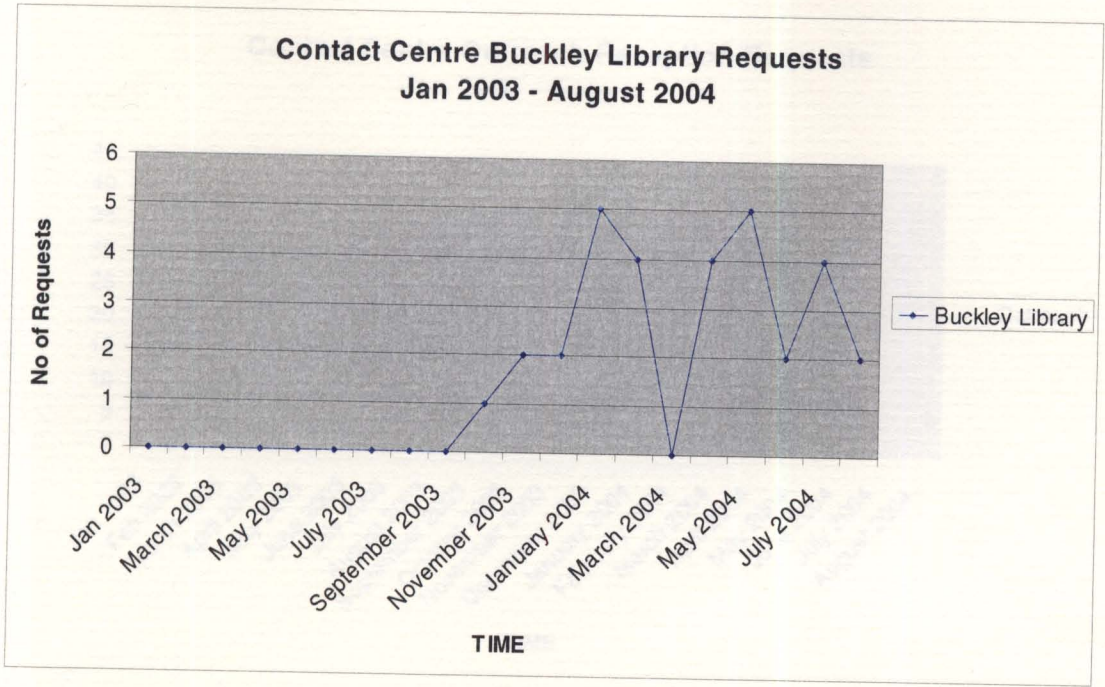


Table 4.6. Number of Requests Received via Buckley Library

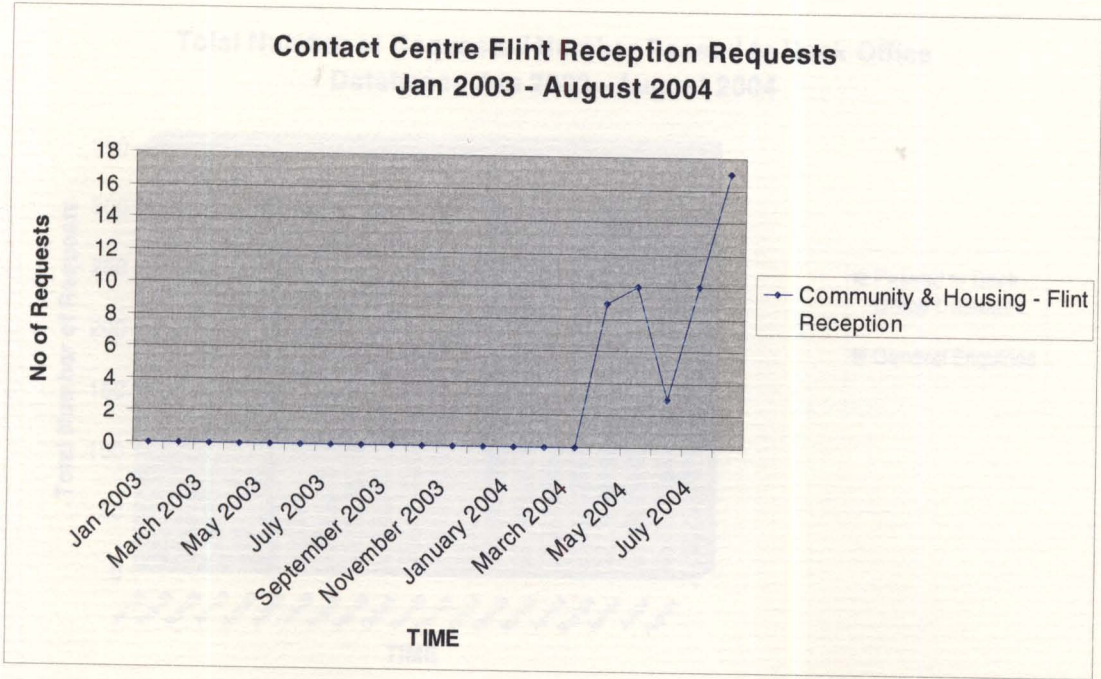


Table 4.7. Number of Requests Received via the Flint Reception

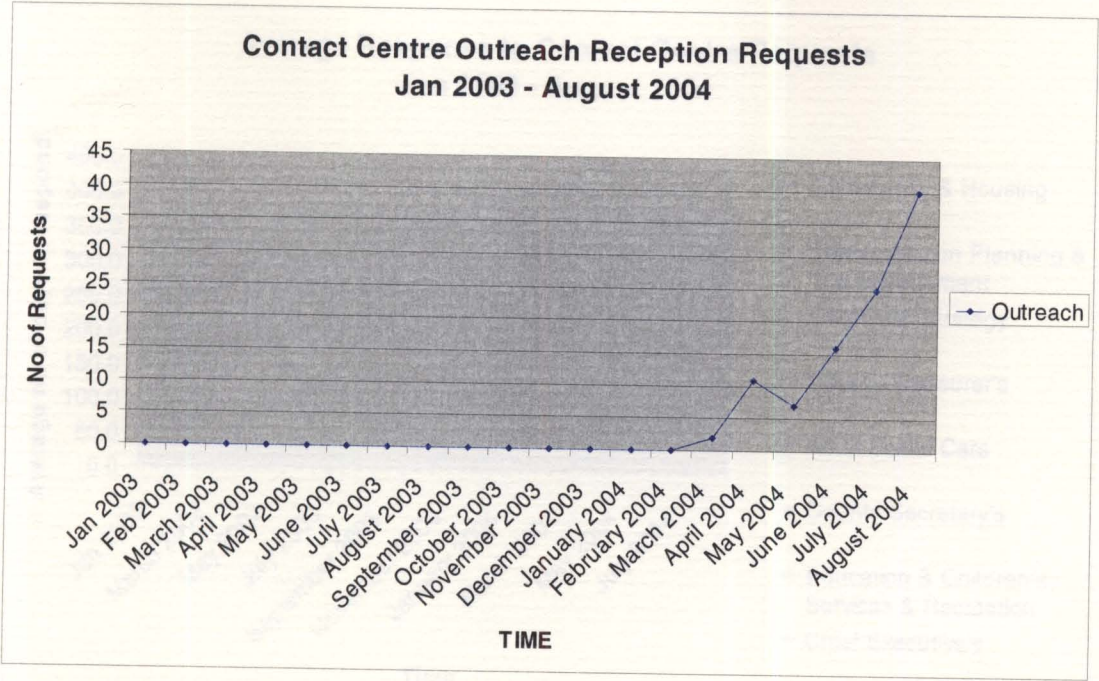


Table 4.8. Number of Requests Received via the Outreach Facility

Table 4.16. Average Response Times to Requests by Directorate

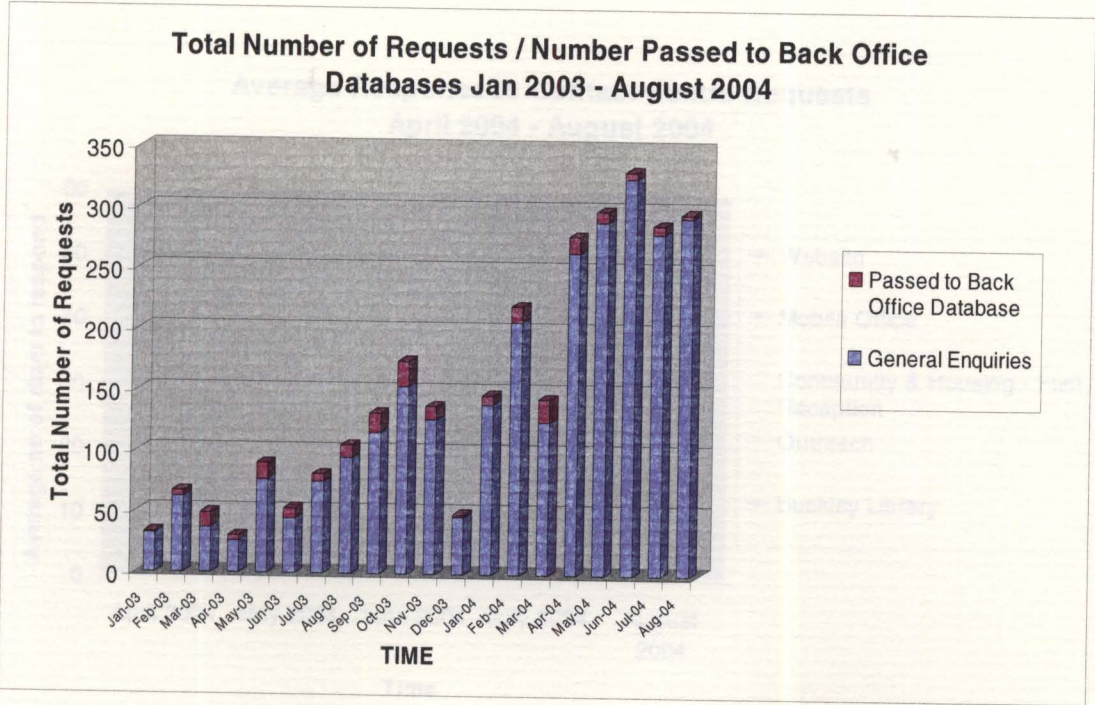


Table 4.9. Number of Requests taken and Integrated to the Back Office

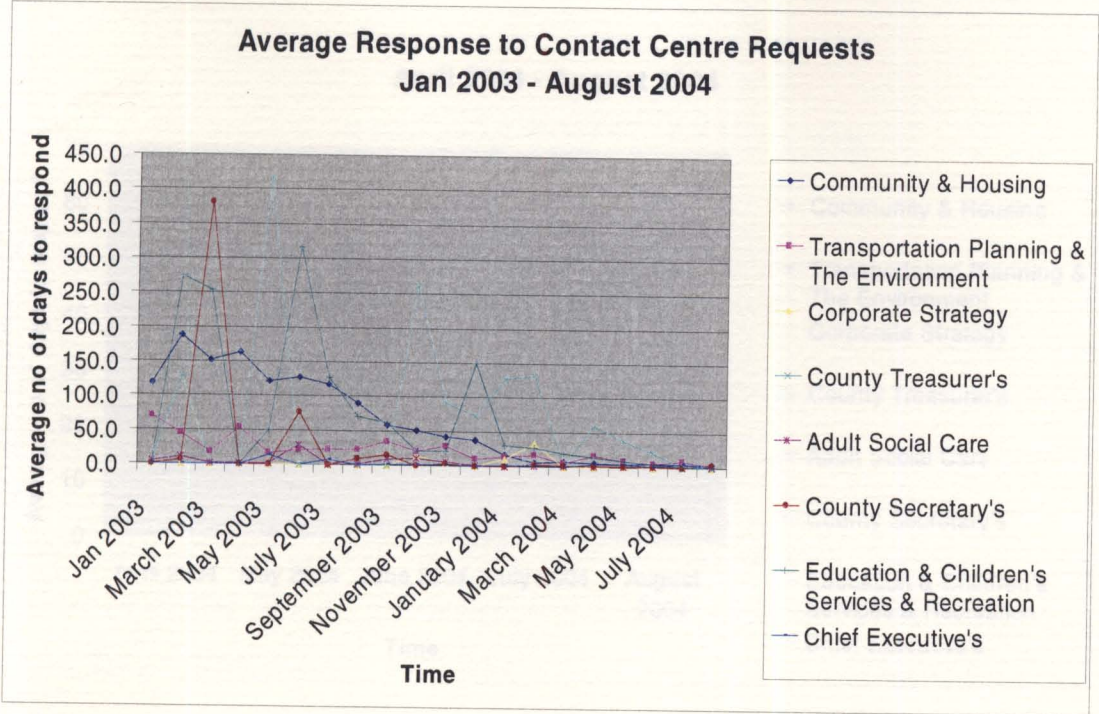


Table 4.10. Average Response Times to Requests by Directorate

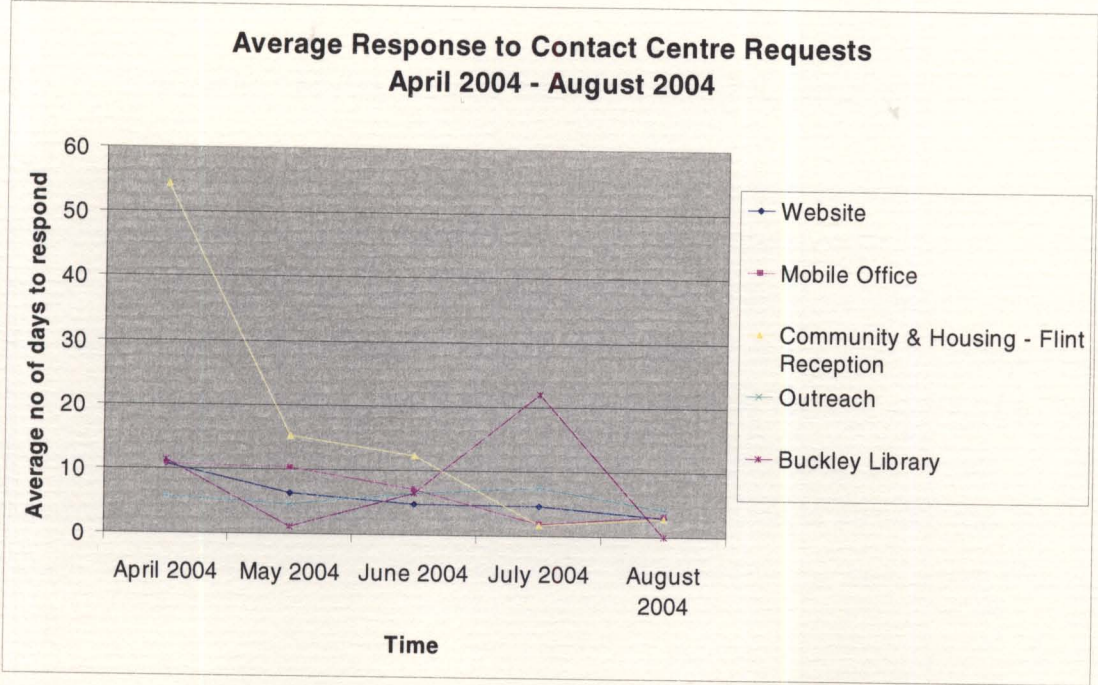


Table 4.11. Average Response Times: Drill down by Channel

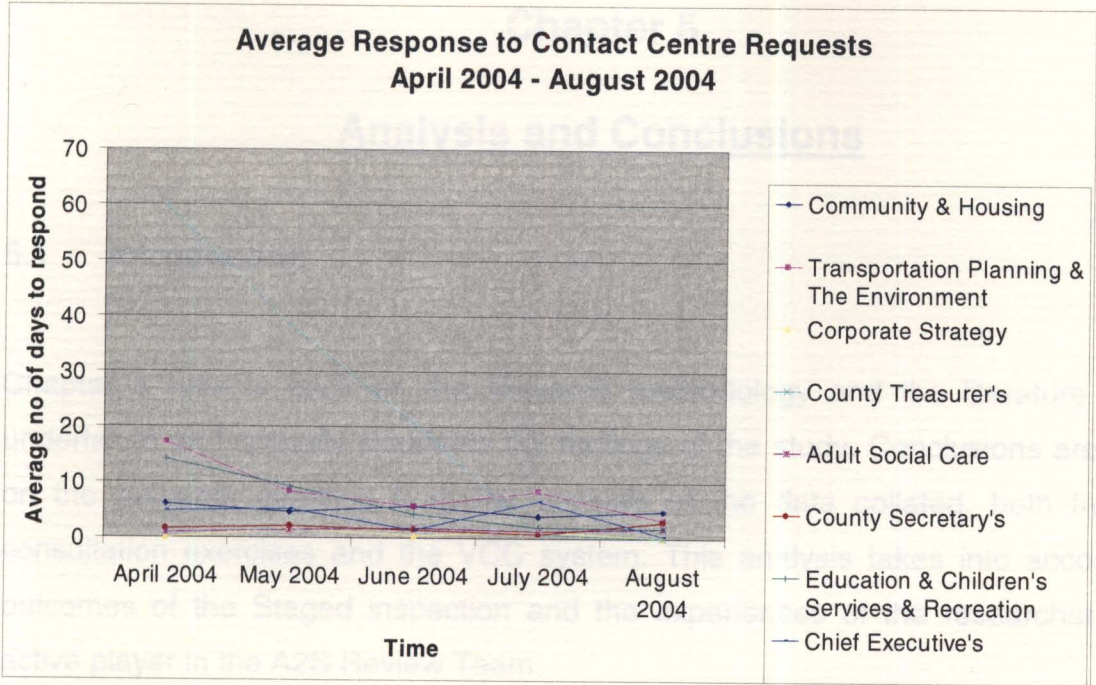


Table 4.12. Average Response Times: Drill down by Directorate

3.2 Evaluation of the 'Mixed' Methodology Approach

The 'mixed' methodology adopted, i.e. that of biographical Explorer (prior) Case Study and Action Learning, proved to be an appropriate choice for the scope of the study undertaken. By the nature of the A25 Review being a 'Staged' inspection and the researcher being an active member of that Team, it was possible to analyse situations as they arose, extending experience and adding strength to what was already known from the research activities. By involving all levels of staff and stakeholders in the consultation, the Case Study approach allowed the researcher to obtain detailed contextual views from those individuals who were using the VCC.

Through the concept of action learning, the researcher, as a major player of the Review Team, was able to test the VCC concept and assess its suitability, appropriateness and effectiveness, as a mechanism to deliver improved services to the customer.

Chapter 5

Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 reflects back on the research methodology and the literature review undertaken and critically evaluates the findings of the study. Conclusions are drawn on the research question from the analysis of the data collated, both from the consultation exercises and the VCC system. This analysis takes into account the outcomes of the Staged inspection and the experiences of the researcher as an active player in the A2S Review Team.

The chapter considers the limitations of the 'pilot' Case Study, identifies any future research that would be advantageous for the Council, and offers a synthesis for the way forward for the VCC or any alternative options the Council may wish to consider.

5.2 Evaluation of the 'Mixed' Methodology Approach

The 'mixed' methodology adopted, i.e. that of Biographical Exploratory (pilot) Case Study and Action Learning, proved to be an appropriate choice for the scope of the study undertaken. By the nature of the A2S Review being a 'Staged' inspection and the researcher being an active member of that Team, it was possible to analyse situations as they arose, extending experience and adding strength to what was already known from the research activities. By involving all levels of staff and stakeholders in the consultation, the Case Study approach allowed the researcher to obtain detailed contextual views from those individuals who were using the VCC.

Through the concept of action learning, the researcher, as a major player of the Review Team, was able to test the VCC concept and assess its suitability, appropriateness and effectiveness, as a mechanism to deliver improved services to the customer.

5.3 Analysis of the Themes

5.3.1 Determining the Drivers

The Council Corporate Objectives and those of the A2S Review, 'to improve access to Flintshire County Council services' have been clearly defined in earlier chapters (refer to Sections 1.1 and 4.2.1). Those involved were mindful of the fact that the initial main drive for the VCC was the Crime and Disorder Audit and not the wider remit of the Review. As such, to fully assess the potential of the VCC there was a need to go back and re-define the goals and objectives. The original action plan for the VCC (Appendix D) had been completed successfully, but no rolling plan existed to define how the initiative would move forward.

A number of cross-cutting initiatives had developed since the inception of the VCC. The Flintshire Initiative Diagram (Appendix E) illustrates those more closely linked with the A2S Review. This demonstrated how the e-Government drive towards joined-up cross-directorate working was evident within Flintshire County Council.

At the earlier Stages of the Review, the North Wales e-Government Group (NW-eGG), undertook a review of the options for CRM deployment. Assisted by the Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM), the resulting report gave a clearer understanding of the potential of CRM and offered 6 options for consideration (refer to Appendix H).

Each of the Authorities had made, to varying degrees, some progress with improving customer access, but none had actually implemented the concept of a fully integrated CRM solution. This cautious approach was also clearly evident in the literature, where the Oakwood Consulting survey (1999) had reported Authorities throughout the UK being at different stages of planning and implementing call/contact technology.

By taking the more pragmatic approach to e-Government, Flintshire had set in place its VCC Action Plan, with clearly defined tasks and milestones to test the concept before undertaking any major investment in CRM. The EOI/IDea Project (2000) had championed the concept of a Contact Centre as a tool to enable and embody radical culture change and a means of pooling resources, to produce a better level of service delivery to the customer.

Telephone contact was the preferred method (refer to Chapters 3 and 4), but there was willingness by the public to try out new technologies. Deploying the VCC at other locations and channels, such as the website, leisure centres, supermarkets via kiosk technology and potentially every staff member's desk, would not only build on this preference, but allow the solution to be used to log requests and enquiries by other means of contact, e.g. face-to-face, e-mail and in writing.

5.3.2 Assessing the Benefits and Identifying the Issues

Reflecting on the Review and the recommendations in the A2S Stage 2 Report (refer to Chapter 4), the Review Team decided that the best approach to determine how the VCC was performing was to undertake an assessment of the system, analyse what had been achieved to date and to look to the future potential of the solution. A small group from the Review Team worked closely with the in-house developers to identify issues and areas of improvement that needed to be addressed. By introducing this style of working, the Council had a duty to ensure that the solution was as faultless and as seamless as possible in that delivery.

Buckley (2003) had reminded us that – *“Governments do not envisage e-Government as replacing, but supplementing existing services”*, and as such the VCC solution must be marketed to the staff as a ‘complementary tool’. Successfully communicating its potential, the Authority would be able to realise what Buckley described as the unexpected benefit of being more transparent, and links to the centre being made more visible to the user, through the very nature of this electronic provision.

The literature had cited three areas that would need to be considered by an organisation before undertaking a Call or Contact Centre venture - staffing related, systems and technologies, and accessibility issues. FITLOG had emphasised the staff related issues and that Call Centre projects were stretching change management skills and resources. Whilst the workshop did not pay particular attention to those issues, there would need to be a major debate on how the further deployment would affect the efficiencies of the current staffing levels and working practices within the Authority.

The more recent Gershon Report (2004) debated 'Releasing Resources to the Front Line' and defined *"efficiency in the public sector as involving making best use of the resources available for the provision of public services. This review has defined as 'efficiencies' those reforms to delivery processes and resource (including workforce) utilisation that achieve: -*

- *reduced numbers of inputs (e.g. people or assets), whilst maintaining the same level of service provision; or*
- *lower prices for the resources needed to provide public services; or*
- *additional outputs, such as enhanced quality or quantity of service, for the same level of inputs; or*
- *improved ratios of output per unit cost of input; or*
- *changing the balance between different outputs aimed at delivering a similar overall objective in a way which achieves a greater overall output for the same inputs (allocative efficiency)".*

This central focus would increase the productivity rates of public sector employees (both through individual productivity increases and reductions in job numbers) and through procuring and allocating of resources differently, there would be cost benefits to the public purse. However, when considering Chassey and Case's (2003) statement on the new levels of skills that would be needed, the Council must build on the expertise and knowledge of the services that the existing staff already had.

5.3.3 The VCC System and Underpinning Technologies

The Workshop turned its attentions to identifying the existing issues with the VCC solution. The specific issues are detailed in Appendix F, with the main categories detailed below:

- general issues e.g. connectivity, workflow process
- technical issues e.g. audit trail, database search
- data issues e.g. type of contact, contact reference
- training issues e.g. refresher training, awareness
- roles and responsibilities e.g. ownership
- performance analysis e.g. set baseline and targets, performance measures
- role of the A-Z of Services Database, e.g. management, quality of content.

It had been pointed out in the literature that a Local Authority delivers in excess of 750 services supported by both manual and electronic systems. An A-Z of Services database had been developed to underpin the VCC solution. The timely and accurate maintenance of the information contained in the database was fundamental to the success of the VCC, as the user needed to have as much information about those services to hand, to be able to resolve as many customer queries at the ‘first point of contact’.

To address the issues to enhance and future-proof the in-house system, considerable investment into new programming technologies and IS staff training had been made e.g. Java and Websphere. Also, it was evident from the study, that the Council had made major investment in its infrastructure, to address organisational capacity, as part of its Business Continuity Plan. The hardware and software, and networking capabilities are well advanced and of the highest specification. With the Freedom of Information Act as a major driver, the Authority was looking to implement an Electronic Data Records Management System (EDRMS) and other technologies, which would support the move towards CRM in the future.

Running alongside the VCC initiative, a major review of the telephone system was taking place. The current system was very much a financial charging module with limited capability to analyse the calls and inform the Council as to whether customer satisfaction was improving. By enhancing the analysis capabilities, this would make a fundamental contribution to ascertaining if customer satisfaction with the service delivery was improving.

Whilst these latest technologies being implemented at Flintshire were more than capable of sustaining the connectivity and workflow processes of the VCC, it was apparent that a Business Processing Re-engineering (BPR) initiative needed to be undertaken to look at the work processes in the back-office, especially if future integration to other back-end systems was to be a serious consideration. When the VCC was integrated to the Environmental Services' back-office, no consideration was given to the current work processes and as such, problems had arisen within the department. Additionally, there were a number of disparate systems in use, which would not conform to easy integration.

Affirmed by Heeks and Bhatnager (1999) and Kaylor *et al*, (2001), Information Systems are central to the vision of e-Government and the streamlining of service delivery to realise improved customer satisfaction. In the literature, the case for BPR was very strong. Re-iterating Hammer (1990), if the assumption that existing process could stay exactly as they were, would result in the service delivery and quality diminishing, rather than improving.

5.3.4 Accessibility

To address the issues relating to accessibility, as stated by the EOI/IDea Project in 2000 (see Section 3.2.3), the County would need to maintain a close working relationships with on-going initiatives, that were focused on disability, equality, social inclusion and the Welsh language. Particular attention must be made to the results of the Citizens' Panel and all other consultation undertakings, as this is very much the voice of the customer.

5.3.5 Working Practices and Culture Change

In section 3.2.4, FITLOG (1998) discussed systems, structure and culture as some specific 'changes' for consideration. The VCC had become a new avenue into the Council that had to be recognised and accepted by those providing the ultimate service; *a 'complimentary' tool to enable and amplify culture change for a Local Authority and provide a means of pooling resources to produce a better level of service delivery to the customer.*

e-Government is very much about joined-up working, both internally and externally and the strive towards the common goal of improved customer satisfaction. The Council must embrace that vision and embark on a programme of change. Change Management, as with BPR, would be a major initiative that Flintshire County Council must address in its move towards CRM.

5.3.6 Assessing Success

The literature has asked the question as to why it is necessary to measure customer satisfaction. Hill, Brierley and MacDougal (1999) illustrated in their Customer Satisfaction Measurement Process (Figure 3.1, Chapter 3) that measuring satisfaction was very much an iterative process. It is quite evident that Flintshire would need to have a baseline in place against which to affect such a measurement. The VCC Improvement Workshop had identified the following:

- the need to set targets/performance indicators for the VCC
- to determine the sources for quantitative and qualitative data
- to review current performance measures
- to expand on what is currently achievable with the quantitative data e.g. to include type of contact as a breakdown
- to determine how to assess the quality of the service
- to provide regular standard reports to be considered by the departments, as a regular agenda item.

5.3.7 Statistical Analysis: Quantitative versus Qualitative

a. Quantitative Analysis

VCC system data

The data collated from within the VCC System database was deemed to be very much 'quantitative'. The system held all customer contacts, irrespective of whether they were passed to the back-end Environmental Services systems or were collated as General Enquiries.

The available data spanned a timeline from January 2003 to August 2004. As mentioned in section 4.2, the implementation of the VCC solution had been an incremental process for the five access channels. The Mobile Office had been the first to be implemented, followed by the Website and the Buckley Library in the third quarter of that year. The Flint Main Reception and the 'Outreach' facility followed in March 2004.

Table 4.2 collectively illustrated the number of contacts (requests for information or service) for all of the five access channels, whilst table 4.3 portrayed the same contacts but viewed by the 8 County Directorates.

Tables 4.4 through to 4.8 illustrated the same contacts received, but independently for each of the access channels.

Tables 4.9 had broken down the total contacts into the ones which were sent to the back-office Environmental Services systems and those termed as General Enquiries.

Tables 4.10 to 4.12 illustrated the average response times taken for each contact to be completed by Directorate and access channel. The response time was determined by the system as being the point at which the users of the system date-stamped the VCC record as complete. The Service area was notified of contacts relative to its services via an e-mail notification, as discussed in section 4.1. In terms

of defining 'complete', this was only at the point that the staff member actually entered a date onto the VCC system.

Observations and Findings

The researcher has been able to make a number of key observations from this quantitative analysis of the VCC data.

- i. low usage - of some access channels
- ii. steady increase - in Directorate service requests
- iii. peaks and troughs - over the timeline
- iv. integrated services - limited contacts for Environmental Services
- v. high response times initially - but marked improvements
- vi. low usage.

Having analysed the use of the access channels, the researcher noted that both the website and the Mobile Office had taken-off very well. Table 4.2 illustrates that the website had made a steady increase in the number of contacts, rising from 120 in November 2003 up to 270 in January 2004, and was cited as the best performing of all the channels.

The Mobile Office reflected a steady increase in contacts in the earlier months with over 100 in August 2003, but the numbers were starting to drop. This could be attributed to the 'Outreach' facility, which was provided as an alternative contact, by the same Mobile Office staff. This facility was showing a steady increase in calls and looking latterly at the contacts for both channels showed that collectively they logged on average between 70 and 80 contacts per month. It would be important to monitor these two channels, as there may be an issue emerging with the resource requirements to maintain a steady increase for the future.

Both the Library and the Reception were reflecting poor usage. The Library had only achieved a maximum of 5 calls per month and this was now dropping, The Reception was beginning to show an increase, but the actual number of calls was still very low (less than 20 per month).

ii. Steady Increase

However, when turning to the number of contacts in terms of the Directorates, the evidence clearly showed that these were on the increase. The highest numbers of contacts were being made to the Directorates where the services were deemed to be more customer-focused by their nature. In August 2004, Community & Housing had received 100 calls and Transportation, Planning & Environmental had received 95. This gave a clear indication that the customers were aware of these alternative methods of contacting the Council, albeit, it would seem that some channels were more favoured than others.

iii. Peaks and Troughs

It was interesting to note that for all of the channels, distinctive peaks and trough of usage were reflected. When considered more closely these echoed a 'seasonal' trend. Contacts made via the website showed 120 contacts in November 2003. The following month over the Christmas period, these fell to 50, but by the end of January 2004 the contacts were back up to 150. For the Mobile Office, the number of calls decreased in the autumn and wintertime, when it would appear that the weather might be a contributing factor.

iv. Integrated Services

The picture reflected in table 4.9 was somewhat concerning. The number of contacts shown as logged to the back-office Environmental Services was very low. Further investigation by the researcher and some Team members brought to light the fact that the VCC had been causing an issue for the Manager of those services. Contacts relating to the same service request (e.g. logging of an abandoned vehicle) had resulted in duplicate requests being logged. The Manager had requested that for

some of the integrated services the contacts were to be routed into the General Enquiries and not directly to the back-office. Hence the low reflection of the figures and the Manager's concerns backed-up the literature and the researcher's viewpoint on the importance of BPR referred to earlier in the chapter.

v. High Response Times

The evidence on response times (tables 4.10 to 4.12) had reflected a steady decrease in the number of days. Initially, the response times were very high, with clear evidence of issues in some Directorates more than others. Further detailed analysis would need to be undertaken, to identify exactly what had caused such delays. Were they system, training, resources or data issues? However, it was very encouraging to note that all calls recorded in the past 2 months were on average, all below the Flintshire Customer Care standard to respond within 10 days.

It was evident that the data currently available from the VCC System did provide an element of customer satisfaction with the access channels being offered, as there was statistical evidence emerging from the usage and the response times. However, this apparent satisfaction was not backed up by actual qualitative feedback from those customers who had used the VCC in this way.

Citizens' Panel

From having analysed the results of the Citizens' Panel undertaken in February 2004, there was limited evidence of customer satisfaction. 64% felt that they were treated as a valued customer by Flintshire County Council. However, the earlier Panel questions were not comparable to this latter one, so it was not possible to identify if this reflected a real improvement. The County needed to be sure that any future surveys were asking questions that could be compared to previous undertakings, in order to formulate an evidenced view on customer satisfaction.

b. Qualitative Analysis

From the variety of consultation exercises undertaken since the introduction of the VCC, there was some evidence that could be termed as ‘qualitative’ data, to support any attestation of improved customer satisfaction. However, this was by no means conclusive.

Consultation Workshops

As discussed in Chapter 4, an extensive programme of consultation workshops had taken place as part of the Review that included the staff and external participants. The attendees had considered the strengths that they felt the County had relating to accessing its services. Whilst many were identified (refer to Appendix A), there was little to justify improved customer satisfaction.

Mechanisms to support public consultation were evident, including the Citizens Panel, Focus Groups, Customer Complaint Strategy and a strong commitment to collaborative partnerships in the Community. An emergency callout service covering 24hrs/365 days access and an Emergency Planning Division, were well established.

The attendees had recognised that there were issues to be addressed, before access to the services, and ultimately improved service delivery could be realised. Some of the more fundamental issues discussed were:

- opening hours/time constraints
- office locations and isolation
- staff attitudes/staff & public resistance to cultural change
- Customer Care inconsistency
- physical access to buildings.

Citizens' Panel

The 2004 Citizens' Panel questionnaire covered a number of areas relating to Access To Services, namely:

- Customer Care
- contacting the Council
- Council Website.

Included in the Citizens' Panel results were a range of text responses made by the respondents for each of these areas (refer to Appendix G). From these, the researcher had been able to draw out a number of themes:

- not getting a fast response
- telephone more personal
- not open and accessible - unsuitable hours
- not aware of the 'contact' facility
- need for alternative locations.

When specifically considering the responses most pertinent to the channels used by the VCC, many of those surveyed indicated that they were not aware of the contact facility at the library, whilst some did not even know that Flintshire had a Mobile Office. Many felt that the facility had not been publicised fully. The website received a 'mixed' view, but the observations on the content and information were very positive. As both the website and the VCC were driven from the same database of information (A-Z of Services), the comments were encouraging.

However, from the text responses received, it was not possible to draw any positive conclusion on the levels of customer satisfaction. There was some indication of the desire to see the VCC service extended, both in locations and opening hours: *"Offices not open when I finish work"* and *"Library not open when I am off work"*

5.4 Conclusions on the Hypothesis

The research problem was to determine whether improved access to services by means of a 'Virtual' Contact Centre actually improves service delivery. In the view of the researcher, the 'pilot' Case Study being undertaken at Flintshire had not produced significant evidence to support the claim.

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collated, had indicated that the VCC provided a welcome alternative means of contacting the Council. It was clear from the study that the VCC was being used but it would appear that some access channels had been more successful than others. This was evident in the actual number of requests logged at each of the access points, as shown in tables 4.2 to 4.8.

The analysis supported the assertion that the response times had improved somewhat overall, although there were isolated occasions where this was not borne out. Generally, these response times were falling well within the guidelines being set by the Customer Care Standards and Policies.

The overall perception of the VCC was that it allowed the customer to choose an alternative method of access to the Council. It provided a 'glossy' front-end, but with little evidence to support its contribution to improved customer satisfaction with the actual back-office services.

As a 'tool' to assist the staff at the County, it was evident that the issues with the technology as discussed were having a negative impact on the staff views of the VCC solution. The analysis also supported the affirmation that the County had not, to date, put in place the mechanisms required to broaden its consultation with the public in order to ascertain levels of satisfaction that could be built on in the future.

It is therefore the view of the researcher, that the hypothesis is not fully proven but that there is clear evidence of the potential for improvement in customer satisfaction being realised through a VCC.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The initiative to introduce the VCC at Flintshire was part of the far wider remit of the A2S Review. As the project was not initially driven by the e-Government Modernisation Agenda, the focus was not on that of customer satisfaction, but on the need to collate statistical information required for the Crime and Disorder Audit.

There were many other customer-focused initiatives impacting on the A2S Review, e.g. the Customer Care Strategy and the Website Development. The Customer Care Strategy was being developed as part of the same Review, but its outcomes were being delivered way beyond the introduction of the VCC solution to the five access channels. Some of the issues identified may have been addressed or actually avoided had these Policies and Standards been developed in the earlier days of the project.

The researcher was restricted by the data available for analysis and as such, it limited the conclusion on the hypothesis. It is felt that had baseline performance mechanisms and measures been identified earlier, then other means of consultation and data collection could have been set in place. It is only in the latter stage of the Review, that the attentions were being turned to that of monitoring and measuring and it is felt that this had allowed the VCC to be subjected to issues that could have been avoided.

On reflection, had time allowed then the researcher would have encouraged the Review Team to recommend undertaking a more 'customer-focused' consultation with the public themselves, to be able to gauge actual levels of satisfaction. This became apparent, as the available data proved to be very restrictive and not totally suited to the study being undertaken.

5.6 Synthesis of the Way Forward

Whilst the Review is nearing completion in the five priority areas, it is important to note that each of these initiatives must be continued beyond the final Stage 3. This is especially so for the VCC, if its potential to improve customer satisfaction is to be realised within Flintshire, be it from future deployment or by developing the concept of CRM.

As a consequence of the conclusions reached in this Case Study, a number of key recommendations and actions are offered.

1. **Identify what affects customers' satisfaction and measure what matters to the customer**

The National CRM Programme Business Case (2003) illustrated, through its model of 'What Affects Customer Satisfaction', how a Council should consider the impact of access, the call experience, and outcome and end-to-end times on customer satisfaction (Table 3.2). The analysis of the available data clearly indicated that the impacts for Flintshire were very much in keeping with those cited in the model, e.g. *'Council is contactable in convenient hours'* and *'Done faster than expected'*.

Further analysis must be undertaken to identify all impacts from a wider group of customers than those involved in the Citizens' Panel.

Hill, Brierley and MacDougal (1999) stated *"Satisfaction is simple. If you get what you want, if your requirements are met, then you are satisfied"*.

In assessing the 'call experience', the Council had made good progress. An initiative was underway to improve the telephone system (discussed in section 5.2) to be able to provide more meaningful statistics, such as response times and lost calls. A 'mystery shopper' survey was currently being undertaken by Opinion Research Services (ORS), to determine the quality of how the calls are handled by the staff.

It is of paramount importance that the Review Team analyse the outcomes from these initiatives, to inform the future performance monitoring mechanisms that need to be defined.

However, what were not considered fully were the outcomes and the end-to-end times on customer satisfaction. This must form part of the recommendation to look at the back-office processes to be discussed later.

2. Consultation Strategy

Chapter 4 discussed in detail the consultation that had taken place during the Review, but section 5.5 had highlighted the limitations of that consultation. Customers know what they are entitled to and their views must be listened to. The Council needed to build on what the customer characterised as a 'good service experience', by thinking about the actual elements of customer service.

What is 'desired' is the experience that the Council is planning to deliver. The 'actual' is that which the customer is receiving, whilst most important to the customer, is the 'expected'. This is what the customer brings with them when they contact the Council services.

To determine those expectations, different methods of consultation/survey need to be considered including:

- call-back facility – at a set number of days following the original contact date
- 'listen in' and learn from the customer telephone calls
- face-to-face customer surveys
- repeat Citizens' Panels, at more regular intervals
- on-line feedback surveys, specific to customer satisfaction
- type of 'contact' enquiry, i.e. information, complaint or service request

- integration of the current feedback mechanisms into the VCC solution, i.e. website feedback and complaints.

3. Performance Monitoring – the End-To-End Experience

Having established the customer expectations, the Council must set in place the performance indicators against which it would measure and monitoring customer contact and satisfaction.

The National Programme Business Case (2003) emphasised that to be able to focus and drive for improvement, targets must be set against measures of outcomes that matter to the customers, and used in the context of the method used, e.g. a Contact Centre. They illustrated this in the Service Improvement Targets diagram (Figure 3.3), which emphasised *“the measures that matter to customers tend to be end-to-end, crossing organisation and functional boundaries and at the basic level are done”*.

The service departments need to consider the end-to-end times of all its service deliverables, e.g. how long does it take to fix the dripping tap? It must evaluate the outcomes, i.e. was the repair done well? Finally, it must assess the quality of the contact experience, i.e. were the staff helpful and informative?

In terms of monitoring telephone calls, suggested performance analysis would cover:

- time to answer – across various time bands
- number of calls received
- peaks and troughs of call times
- abandoned calls
- call durations
- reduction in calls.

4.4 Business Processing Re-engineering

Before the Council considers integrating the VCC to any further back-office systems, it is recommended that a programme of BPR be undertaken. The analysis had highlighted a major issue for Environmental Services, where calls logged to the back-office staff were often duplicated. Had the current business processes been considered prior to integrating these services, then such issues could have potentially been avoided.

Katner (1990) argued that successful organisations were characterised by their ability to be 'fast', 'friendly' and 'flexible'. Ultimately, as contacts via the VCC increased, it would be pointless to have a perfect, all 'singing and dancing' front-end, if the back-end cannot cope with the volumes of calls generated. The VCC and e-service delivery would however discharge many of the manual processes that can be time consuming.

The Council needed to ensure that duplication of effort, documentation and processes are identified and streamlined. This could be achieved through BPR and process mapping to provide a seamless service.

By undertaking a programme of BPR the Council would need to decide which services to address. To start 'small' would be one method to proof the concept, so as to learn from the experience, identify the issues and be able to adjust the procedures that would need to be put in place. Alternatively, would the Council chose a straightforward service, with little input and few outputs or one where there was a drive from management, such as the service has been identified as a priority e.g. Data Image Processing (DIP) and Workflow within County Treasurer's Department. This would need to be a topic of some lengthy debate for the Authority.

5. VCC System Issues

The VCC Improvement Workshop had identified a number of issues with the actual software (see Appendix F).

Whilst this was fundamental to the future success of the VCC, it was recognised by the researcher that a re-design of the technical solution was currently underway.

A recent report on the options for the way forward for CRM at the Council had been presented (refer to Section 5.2 and Appendix H), and whilst Option 6 (retaining the VCC) had been cited as one of the preferred, this in itself highlighted the importance resolving known issues.

6. Managing the Culture Change

It has been stated that culture change is by far the biggest challenge to be managed and must be driven and supported from the top of the organisation right down to the bottom. The A2S Review had received ownership at the highest level, with the Chief Executive taking the role of the Project Sponsor. Commitment from the Review Team members and from many of the Managers involved, had ensured that the VCC solution was implemented on target. However, this new 'tool' and way of working would need to be embraced by the staff and the customers to ensure its success.

Building on the recommendations being made, with the assumption that all issues would be resolved, the Council would need to recognise that there would ultimately be some changes in the culture of the organisation, and to undertake a programme of Change Management facilitated by experts in that field.

The change must be well planned, with clear direction and good communication in place. Buckley (2003) noted *"it is important to consider the internal environment and the likely degree of co-operation of the players in the internal system"* and that the technology was often viewed as a 'threat' to *"the status quo such as challenging current management or organisational practices"*. The Council has agreed the need for the role of a Customer Care Manager and it would be a major challenge for this

person to sell the vision that the staff do not work for Flintshire County Council, but that they actually work for the customers of the Authority.

5.7 Summary

Reflecting back on the analysis and conclusions drawn from the research themes studied and embracing the recommendations made, would provide Flintshire County Council with the opportunity to build upon the successes of the VCC to date. Furthermore, it is hoped that the County recognises how fundamentally important it is to act upon the need for appropriate monitoring and performance mechanisms, especially if the research hypothesis set in this study was to be proven in the future.

Chapter 6

Critical Reflection

6.1 Researcher's Observations

The researcher has found it a most valuable exercise in undertaking this Case Study, particularly in striving to conclude on the hypothesis. The deployment of the VCC only formed a small part of the overall Review objectives and, by undertaking the study it has allowed the drawing out of both the benefits and the shortcomings of the solution.

It was not until the data analysis was undertaken that these were highlighted. Having delivered the solution to the five access points on target has initially portrayed a false impression of the success and future potential of the solution. At that time, the impending issues and considerations for the way forward were not apparent to the Team.

It has been very useful to reflect on the view expressed in the literature, as the Call Centre concept is relatively new to Local Authorities. The researcher is very keen to be involved in any undertakings that Flintshire County Council may embark upon as it moves toward the implementation of a CRM, and it is hoped that the experiences she has gained and the recommendations made in the study, will be recognised and considered by the Council. It is apparent that without the commitment and focus of the Review Team, this study would not have been as rewarding for the researcher.

Glossary Of Terms

Audit Commission

A free-standing Government body, which audits Local Government Authorities, Health Authorities and the Police. They were formed to promote the best use of public money.

Back-Office Systems

Systems which are not directly available to the customers but that might hold relevant information. A CRM will link together back-office systems and front-office systems. Back-Office Systems or applications provide functions and information for internal staff.

BPR - Business Process Re-engineering

The ideas of BPR came into being in the 1990s. Its aim is *"to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the business by exploiting the potential of IT to enable radically new organisational structures and processes"*. (National CRM Programme Business Case)

Channel

A channel is a means for citizens to contact the Council. This could include the use of technologies such as the internet, mobile phone, telephone or it could be face-to-face. Each of these different ways of communicating is described as a channel. The same as access channel.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

This is a generic name for a system that allows an organisation to manage every aspect of their relationship with their customers. In the context of local government, information about customers / citizens is acquired from various sources and brought together in a joined-up and integrated way.

Election Manifesto

A public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions, especially of a political nature.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The technology required for information processing, in particular the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, process, transmit, and retrieve information.

Integration

Integration in the context of the customer contact and CRM is the provision of integrated services to support our customers. Therefore, in the context of satisfying business transactions, this means the ability to connect various business systems in a seamless manner using some form of “handshake” between the various systems.

Joined Up Services

A principal objective of e-Government is joined up services, joined up information and joined up government. The principle is that the citizen and customer will receive a seamless and joined up service for a range of different service and information providers.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Collated Results from Workshop at A2S Consultation Days Internal, External and Front-line Staff

1. Strengths of access to services in Flintshire.

a. Commonly identified strengths.

1.	Libraries – free internet access and provision of adequate hours (review opening times).
2.	Free transport for men/women over 60/ Community transport schemes.
3.	Introduction of website information only/ Joined-up thinking/working. E.g. Web based Community Directory/ A-Z/ Harmonisation of database/quality information BUT information must be accurate.
4.	Public consultation: Citizens' Panel, Focus groups/ Customer service issue strategy/ Strong commitment to collaborative partnerships in the Community
5.	Fairly modern telephone systems
6.	Home visits
7.	Area offices/Carelink/ Community Houses
8.	Emergency callout service / emergency planning 24hrs/365 days on-call and access.
9.	Introduction of Mobile Advise Centre/ Mobile Office
10.	Care.comm

b. Different strengths identified.

<u>Internal</u>	<u>External</u>
1. Local presence in most communities (urban)	1. Broadband: primary/secondary schools
2. Bi-lingual information	2. Demand Responsive Transport System: Deeside
3. Appointment of specialist staff	3. Blue Bag recycling/ Wheelie bin for garden refuse pilot/ Well maintained waste sites BUT not easily accessible
4. Building survey/improvement	4. Bus service accessibility. + and - (Disabled users)
5. Strengths of budget prioritisation	5. Move to Microsoft
7. TP&E reception	
8. Dual use of schools	

2. Customer inaccessibility.

a. Commonly identified issues. (Note: Internal day considered FCC only.)

1. Opening hours/time constraints/times of staff availability: outside of office hours/home visiting/surgeries in Community Centres/office locations and isolation.
2. Staff attitudes: training needs/knowledge/staff & public resistance to cultural change /staff lack of communication and Customer Care inconsistency
3. Customers lack of knowledge where services are and how services are delivered. e.g. Blue Bag – where from? Do not know what customers want. & how services are delivered Lack of communication about services. Lack of internal knowledge: signposting internal/external/departments/services. Lack of appropriate information. e.g. leaflets, pamphlets. Require Marketing exercise - telling customers what is available, where, when and how.
4. Transport difficulties – public & private/ No infrastructure for people to access services/transport/language.
5. Departmental cross-boundaries / lack of staff directorate and cross-directorate knowledge.
6. Over complex systems – too many options/ Need for Contact Centre or One-stop shop e.g. Carelink, Depots, Highways, Soc.Services .../ Lack of local contact points within the community/lack of Outreach centres
7. Processes - multi handling: One person to another/ lack of ownership/ cross directorate issues

8. Geographical areas: sense of isolation/ Too centralised.
9. Physical access to buildings/ non-automatic entrance doors (heavy)
10. Language choice
11. Parking

b. Different inaccessibility issues identified.

<u>Internal</u>	<u>External</u>
1. Partnership increasing – clarity of responsibilities	1. Disability ‘symbol’ user (20% companies in FCC have).
2 Overuse of technology (call centre procedural overload) Funding/Investment – hard cash	2. Systems: Contact – reliance on paper

Inaccessibility: Top 5 common themes prioritised by the Internal and External Groups.

1. Single point of contact / Lack of contact points.
2. Lack of communication about services / awareness/ marketing.
3. Ownership of telephone calls / multi-handling of calls/ departmental boundaries.
4. Staff attitude/ training /knowledge/ resistance to culture change.
5. Time constraints of services/ opening times and days.

Appendix B: Directorate Workshop Outcomes

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Welsh Translation	Welsh language translation service	Welsh language translation is an issue time / cost etc... especially on job vacancies (job descriptions not available in Welsh)	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	High	Short
	Welsh translation service is restricting the ability to maximise the use of the web site	Cost and capacity of the Welsh translation service currently holds back the deployment of web site information	Adult Social Care	Low	Short
	Welsh translation cost	The cost of Welsh translation service is prohibitive / Should the costs be maintained and accounted for corporately?	TP & E	High	Short
	Welsh Language Scheme	Why do all documents / services have to be bilingual. This should be based on the customers choice / requirement.	County Treasurers	Medium	Short
Welsh Language Scheme	Adherence to the Welsh language scheme	The service provided generally does not meet the Welsh language scheme requirements	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	High	Long
	Welsh translation - Confirmation of what should be translated.	What should be translated ? This needs to be determined from a legal / liability point of view.	TP & E	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
	Approach to Welsh Language is negative and policing rather than based on positive actions	Approach is seen to be negative and not proactive in getting the Directorate's requirement. Should the Welsh language promotion be dealt with a more flexible manner.	County Treasurers	High	Short
Receptions	County Receptions	To improve the provision of reception / telephone facilities at all Council receptions / entrances.	PSHR / C.Secs / C. Exec	High	Long
	Flint Reception Facilities	Should we be providing video links to the support service staff?	TP & E	Low	Long
	Holywell reception facility is poor / All receptions facilities are generally poor.	No room available to provide proper reception facilities at locations.	Community & Housing	High	Long
	Connahs Quay reception facility not used to full capability	ASC Reception does not provide a full range of service queries.	Community & Housing	High	Short
	Providing separate private phone facilities at reception points	To ensure that the service can be provided when required at receptions.	Community & Housing	High	Short
	Use of the area offices / receptions - Being unaware of launches	Receptions / area offices can be affected by the lack of awareness of launch activities.	Community & Housing	High	Short
	Reception areas	Lack of facilities including interview rooms / consistent personal greeting / front office support / information areas	County Treasurers	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Interview / Meeting Rooms	Mobile office has restricted access and no ability to hold one to one interviews.	The mobile office is extremely lacking in customer space and does not provide an area for one to one discussion.	Adult Social Care	High	Long
	Contact Centre meeting room availability	Meeting rooms are not available to hold one to one reviews at Contact Centres (Flint do not allow interview rooms to be booked by Departments other than housing)	TP & E	Medium	Long
	Interview rooms poor generally	Limited rooms available constrict services that can be provided. Not sound proofed therefore not suitable for customer interviews.	Community & Housing	Medium	Short
Signage	Access to Services - Environmental requirements	There is a need to provide suitable meeting rooms / waiting areas / building access to deal with customers.	Education Recreation Children's Services	Medium	Long
	Signage to locations and services	There is a need to provide suitable signs etc to ensure that the customer can clearly identify the Council and specific service locations.	Education Recreation Children's Services	High	Short
	Signs to area offices / reception / disabled access	There is a need to upgrade the signs used and access at area offices.	Community & Housing	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Corporate Complaints	Corporate complaints	There is a need to provide a central Corporate complaints mechanism / system to control the way in which complaints are raised and processed.	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	Medium	Long
	Complaints procedure - No defined procedure / not understood / does not work.	Complaints / services / compliments procedure no clear / not fully deployed across the Authority - No corporate policy. Some Directorate procedures may be in place but may not be in line with corporate policy which is not defined.	Community & Housing	High	Long
Mobile Office	Further use of mobile office by all Departments	The mobile office service / Contact Centre can be enhanced and deployed in the future in other areas.	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	Medium	Long
	Mobile office planned visits not on regular basis.	Customers cannot easily determine when the mobile office will be present.	Community & Housing	Medium	Short
Disability Access	Disability access - equality to all	To provide easy access to all services / departments	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	High	Long
	Signs to area offices / reception / disabled access	There is a need to upgrade the signs used and access at area offices.	Community & Housing	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Internet / Intranet	FCC policies available on both the Intranet and Internet	There is a need to ensure that policies are available in a consistent manner both internally and externally	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec	Medium	Short
	Intranet facilities should be provided to ensure that all internal staff have access to information	Information is constantly changing and needs to be available to all internal / external customers	Adult Social Care	Low	Short
Lone Working	Lone working Access Policy	No strategy or working practices reduces the ability to provide services / Danger of dependence on individuals working on specific items	Education Recreation Children's Services	High	Short
	Access to services - Lone working	There is need to ensure that staff are trained on the implications of working alone.	County Treasurers	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Outreach	Use of Contact Centre technology in outreach facility	There is a need to provide the Contact Centre facilities in the outreach facility but ensure that the correct Directorate skills are available. (Potential use of customer care champion)	Adult Social Care	Medium	Short
	Presentation of Services - outreach / Contact Centre	Departments should be allowed to provide presentation to those providing the Contact Centre facility to ensure that they have full understanding of the service / Department	TP & E	High	Short
	Outreach to tenants / residents association groups	Outreach can be used to access new groups to promote ALL services.	Community & Housing	Medium	Short
Contact Centre / CRM	Level of threshold / focus on Access to Services Review	Currently in joint review action plan to review threshold	Adult Social Care	High	Short
Out of Hours	Contact Centre deployment / CRM	There should be an assessment of the internal access needs to ensure that the services will meet both internal and external requirements.	Community & Housing	Medium	Short
	Out of hours service provision	Limited services are provided out of hours. Emergency escalation response is available but no access to actual service is available	Adult Social Care	High	Short
	Access out of hours	There is a need to provide increased coverage of services out of hours	Education Recreation Children's Services	Low	Long

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Office Locations	Location of ASC Department.	ASC currently have one contact point with poor vehicular access / location poor for individuals to access services / lack of meeting rooms	Adult Social Care	High	Long
	Access / location of offices	Centralising the offices has caused a problem with accessing the public effectively / cost / time There are a number of calls being received which can become abusive - there is a need to provide customer care standards on how to deal with these calls.	Education Recreation Children's Services	Medium	Long
Security Issues	Customer care guidelines on dealing with irate callers		Education Recreation Children's Services	High	Short
	Security issues - Dealing with customers	No facilities to escalate issues when found - This needs to be reviewed.	Community & Housing	High	Short
Telephone Usage	Security issues - Cash handling at current location. Include out of hours in telephone performance statistics for selected service areas.	Location of the existing cash office causes potential security issues. Calls out of office hours should be monitored to understand the amount of calls lost during this period.	County Treasurers	High	Short
		Infrastructure restricts the ability to manage calls effectively / Lack of handset training / Statistics are not accurate or available in format required	Community & Housing	n/a	0
	Lack of information for telephone usage		County Treasurers	High	Short

Identified Theme	Directorate Access Issue	Description of access requirement	Raised by	Risk Analysis	Short / Long Term
Corporate Identity	Flintshire corporate identity to be further developed to incorporate all departments	Flintshire corporate identity needs to be main-streamed and more effectively promoted to cover all aspects of the Authority.	PSHR / C Secs / C Exec		
	Corporate theme required for reception facilities - consistent look of reception	To ensure that 'first' customer contact is consistent and provides the corporate image.	Community & Housing	High	Long
				Medium	Long

Appendix C: Access To Services Project Definition Risk Log

All risks will be held in the Review risk/issue log maintained by the Review Manager. Any member of the Review team identifying a risk will report it to the Review manager who will update the risk/issue log and assign an owner for containment. The Review team will Review all risks during the Weekly Review Meeting.

The following risks were identified in the workshop :-

Review Risk: Staff available to complete the Review activities as planned

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Set expectation of re-planned Review schedule / potential use of seconded resources.

Review Risk: Cost of implementation of access to services Review not acceptable

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Ensure that Directorate commitment is established

Review Risk: Lack of direction for focus of the Review

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Narrow down the direction of the Review / Use existing methods and/or try and influence longer-term recommendations.

Review Risk: The ability to change the culture of the Authority / working across all departments

Probability of risk: Low

Impact of risk: Medium / High

Containment Action: Ensure that training and education is completed well / Ensure that the focus of the Review is communicated and fully understood.

Review Risk: Lack of coordination of the Review at corporate level

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Map out the structure and present to Directors Group as soon as possible.

Review Risk: Timetable not achievable

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: Medium

Containment Action: Complete the Review schedule as soon as possible, focus on what can be achieved and raise concerns.

Review Risk: Short Term recommendations not accepted

Probability of risk: Low

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Review plans, Review objectives, gain buy in, complete regular communication updates, complete regular risk Reviews.

Review Risk: Long-term recommendations not accepted.

Probability of risk: High

Impact of risk: High

Containment Action: Review plans, Review objectives, gain buy in, complete regular communication updates, complete regular risk Reviews.

Review Risk: Limited focus / scope of initial areas of improvement in short term

Probability of risk: Low

Impact of risk: Low

Containment Action: Consider longer term objectives on a regular basis.

Appendix D: Improvement Planning Action Plan

FORM VERSION IU 1.1

IMPROVEMENT ISSUE	Contact Centre Strategy	REF. NO.	Leave blank
DIRECTORATE	Corporate	YEAR	Current year
ISSUE SPONSOR	Chief Executive		

LINKS TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES		LINKS TO OTHER PLANS								
Providing improved access to and efficiency of all Local Authority services		This strategy forms part of the Access to Services Review and is linked to the following: IEG Statement, Communications, ICT Strategy, Web Site								
LINKS TO SERVICE OBJECTIVES		Extend roll out of Contact Centre and consider options for the future								
ROOT CAUSE(S) OF IMPROVEMENT ISSUE Insufficient points of access to services. FCC targets to provide two further access points to the Contact Centre in line with WAG targets (to provide five Contact Centre service delivery points by March, 2004). Lack of leadership of Contact Centre initiative.										
MEASURES OF CHANGE (What needs to change? What is the measure of change?)	TARGETS					RESOURCES				
	Current perform- -ance	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	£ Yr.	Annual or One- off	Revenue or Capital	Resource approved or requested
1. Increase usage of Contact Centre	Awaiting up to date data.						Cost and year	Is this ongoing or one-off cost?	Is this revenue or capital?	Is this cost within: *base budget *externally funded *bid needed?
2. Establish “Outreach” Office	Target date for implementation is 1 st April, 2004						2003/4 £1474	One off	capital	Successful bid from IEG funding

3. Introduce access to Contact Centre at Flint Reception, County Offices, Flint	Target date for implementation is 1 st April, 2004			
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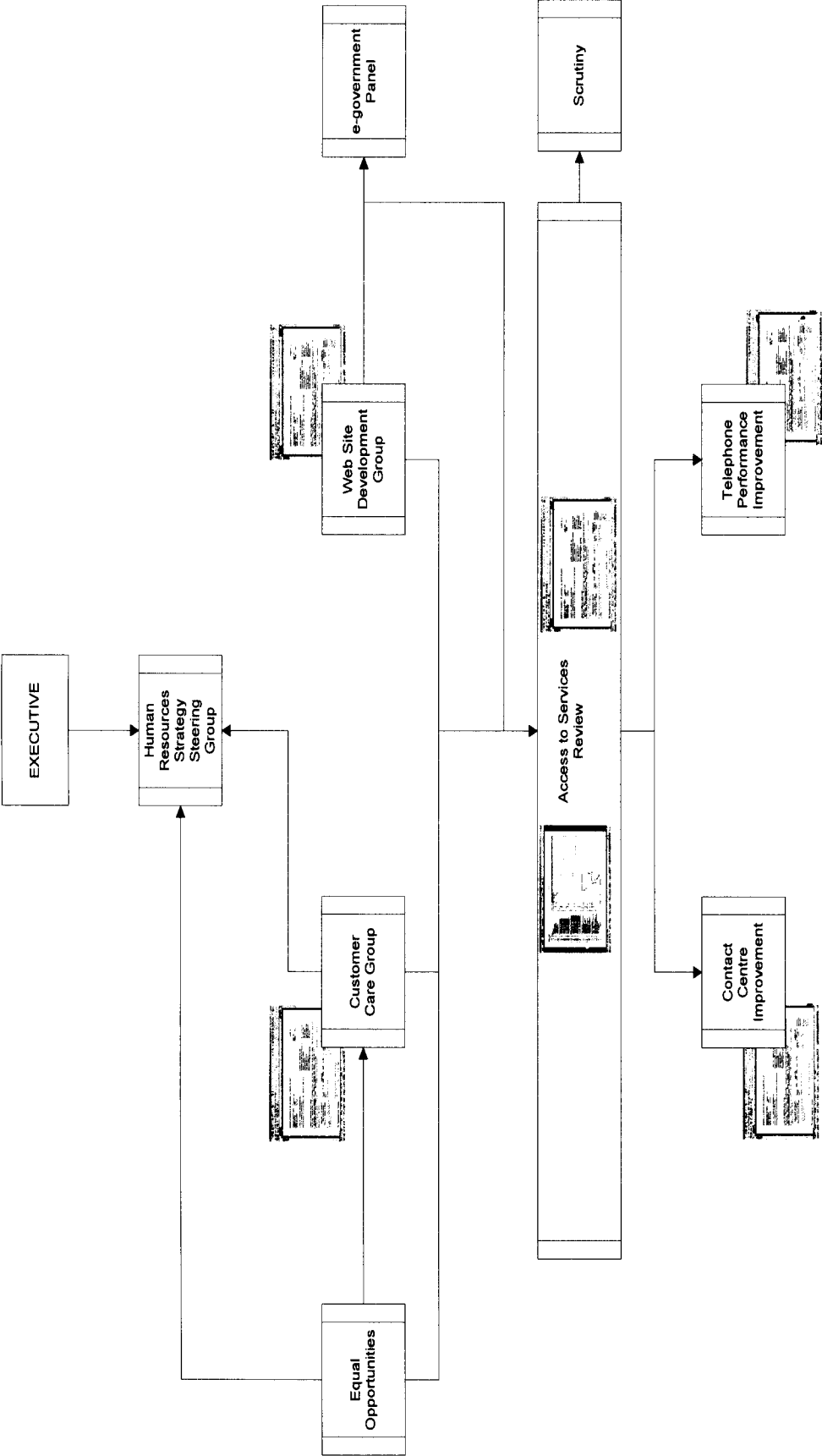
TASKS (per measure of change)	KEY MILESTONES	TIMESCALE		RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	PROGRESS UPDATES (WHO AND WHEN)
		START	END		
1a. Establish responsibility for the management, ongoing monitoring and development, including funding, of the Contact Centre Strategy.	Consider appropriate Directorate Consider requirements for new post or integrated into an existing post.	1/2/04	1/4/04	Jenny Trevor	A2S Review Board to recommend to Directors Group or Executive as appropriate.
1b. Analysis of Contact Centre data to establish number of outstanding enquiries and any emerging patterns and identify actions to be taken to reduce the numbers.	Report to Directors Group		1/4/04	Chris Guest	Access to Services Review Board
1c. Establish baseline of current usage of Contact Centre.	Data to be used to set targets	1/2/04	1/4/04	Les Hay	Access to Services Review Board
1d. Monitoring	Agree monitoring reporting schedule and evaluation of reports			Dependent on outcome of Task 1a.	Access to Services Review Board
2a Establish "Outreach" office	Purchase laptop and printer		31/1/04	Denise Naylor / Aled Griffiths	Access to Services Review Board
	Purchase additional equipment e.g. Presentation board, leaflets, etc.		23/1/04	Denise Naylor	

	Prepare presentation and literature		27/2/04	Mobile Office Team/Barbara Milne	
	Contact organisations and book/deliver presentation sessions		26/3/04	Mobile Office Team	
3a. Implementation of Contact Centre at Flint Reception	Establish replication process to be used and possible review of Contact Centre software		27/2/04	Denise Naylor/Aled Griffith/Les Hay	Access to Services Review Board
	Include "Outreach" parameter for statistics		26/3/04	Jenny Trevor/Les Hay	
	Installation, implementation and testing of system		19/3/04	Les Hay/Development staff	
	Launch and Marketing	1/3/04	8/4/04	Barbara Milne	
	Seek approval from Director of C&H	8/1/04	9/1/04	Lynne Worrall	
	-- approval granted but need to consider funding		23/1/04	Jenny Trevor/Chris Guest	
	Establish if communications are in place to support Contact Centre		30/1/04	Jenny Trevor/Aled Griffith	
	Determine staffing, budget and accommodation requirements		30/1/04	Lynne Worrall/Denise Naylor/Jenny Trevor	
	Presentation to staff	9/2/04	10/2/04	Les Hay/Jenny Trevor/Mobile Office Team	

	Training of staff	15/3/04	16/3/04 4	Mobile Office Team	
				Aled Griffith/ Lynne Worrall/ Denise Naylor	
	Establish specification of existing PC and/or purchase additional PC and printer if required		30/1/04		
	Purchase additional equipment e.g. presentation boards, leaflets, etc.		23/1/04	Lynne Worrall	
	Confirm replication process to be used and possible review of Contact Centre software		30/1/04	Aled Griffith/ Les Hay	
	Include Flint Reception parameter for statistics		26/3/04	Jenny Trevor/ Les Hay	
	Access Control List – include new staff users		26/3/04	Lynne Worrall/ Les Hay	
	Installation, implementation and testing of system		19/3/04	Les Hay/ Development Staff	
	Launch & Marketing	1/3/04	8/4/04	Barbara Milne	

IMPROVEMENT PLAN AUTHORISED BY:		DATE
DIRECTOR
EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Appendix E: Flintshire Initiative Diagram



(Source: Access To Services Review)

Appendix F: VCC Improvement Workshop - Issues

General Issues

- Back end database connectivity
 - i which databases to be connected to?
 - ii how would coverage be improved?
- Limited ability to download information to PC tools such as Excel.
- Instructions on the process of e-mail response and escalation in line with Customer Care Policy and Standards needed to be formalised
- Needed to review the way that the contact officer details were displayed and used –potential for training / awareness sessions
- Definition of the workflow processes from initial contact to conclusion of the request i.e. from point to point.

Technical Issues

- General issues with the forwarding and re-allocating of contacts originally logged in error to the wrong service/department
 - No audit trail
 - Inconsistent process
- Contacts recorded in the VCC as 'not categorised'. Need to investigate how categories are allocated and how these errors were happening.
- Improvements required on the ease of access to records and the ability to search the database quickly.
- Inconsistencies between the e-mails recipients between the databases used by the VCC

Data Issues

Types of contact need to be clearly defined to facilitate analysis of measurement process e.g. whether an 'Information' or a 'Service' requests

Contacts recorded without a reference number

Training Issues

- Training – need to complete refresher training on the use of the VCC for all levels of staff and to include in the Customer Care induction training programme.
- Training and awareness of the solution must be addressed. Senior Managers must be included in the groups
- The way in which new starters are included must be reviewed in conjunction with the maintenance of the A to Z address book entries.

Roles and responsibilities

- Control, management and ownership of the Contact Centre are a current issue which is holding back the ability to effectively develop and deploy improvements.

Performance analysis

- Need to set targets / performance indicators for the VCC
- Determine if the source for qualitative and quantitative data
- Current performance measures need to be reviewed
 - To expand on what is currently achievable with the quantitative data e.g. to include type of contact as a breakdown
 - How to assess the quality of the service
- Provide regular standard reports to be considered by the departments as a regular agenda item

The role of the A-Z of Services Database

- Management and ownership of the A to Z Directory of services information must be reviewed and improved.
- Quality of the content
- Role of the A-Z co-ordinators
- Multi-purpose of the database e.g. web, kiosk, VCC, staff tool, Mobile Office etc

Appendix G: Analysis of Citizens' Panel undertaken in February 2004

The Citizens' Panel questionnaire covered a number of areas relating to Access To Services, namely

- Customer Care
- Contacting the Council
- Council Website

In general the results showed that

- 64% felt that they were treated as a valued customer by Flintshire County Council
- Contact by telephone was still the most favoured option but 23% said they would like to contact via internet
- Of those customers contacting by telephone 90% felt the speed of answering was good
- 99% said their preferred language when talking to the Council was English
- 83% felt the website design was "good"
- 79% felt the website was easy to use

There were insufficient responses to the Welsh and accessibility questions to provide a realistic assessment, hence a potential to have a more focused consultation in the future.

A number of themes have emerged from analysis of the text feedback received from the panel members in the three question areas.

For written correspondence

Not getting a fast response

Telephone deemed to be more personal

For personal visits to a Council Office

Issue with the office not being open

Issue with the office not being accessible

For contact through a library

Not aware of contact facility

Library opening hours

For contact via the mobile office

Many were not aware of the Mobile Office

The Mobile Office did not cover their area

Suggested ways that the 'contact' service could be extended

Alternative locations

Opening hours

Publicity

No need to extend the service

General comments

Improvements to the Website

Information/content

Navigation, links and searching

Speed of access

Look and feel

General issues

Within these themes some examples of comment and suggestion are listed below. A more detailed analysis could provide ‘added value’ to any future considerations in improving the service delivery to the customers and citizens of Flintshire.

Written	<p>“ I wanted a quick response to my request”</p> <p>“I feel I get a better service if more personal on telephone”</p>
Personal visit	<p>“Offices not open when I finish work”</p>
Library	<p>”If I’d had the need, I did not know the service was available”</p> <p>“Library not open when I am off”</p>
Mobile Office	<p>“Did not know I could”</p> <p>“Not one in this area”</p>
Extend service:	<p>Community centres, Post Offices, Clinics, Doctors Surgeries, Supermarket/Retail Park, Leisure Centres etc.</p> <p>Out of hours, Public Offices open on a Saturday, Mobile Office on Market Days, Freephone service etc.</p> <p>Advertise, wider media coverage, better information etc.</p>
Website:	<p>Clearer more specific information, cross referencing, more professional content etc.</p> <p>Easier to understand links, faster search, more internal linkages – not just external.</p> <p>“The new look is more appealing”</p> <p>”We get a lot of ‘broken server’ messages”</p>

Appendix H: Options for Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Option 1: Do Nothing

As discussed above, our neighbouring Authorities and the majority of those in the UK have either implemented or have plans in place

Option 2: Outsourcing / Partnership with the Private Sector

Adopted by such Authorities as Liverpool and Blackburn, this option involves outsourcing or partnering of the ICT support. The model would require significant investment and considerable lead times for selection and negotiation of suitable partners

Option 3: Shared Service

Requiring two or more Authorities working together, this approach would develop a shared call/contact solution. Whilst offering economies of scale there would be the issues to be considered, such as ownership and potential loss of the local identity

Option 4: Hosted Service

Similar to that of a shared service but through the purchase of an established call/contact facility, e.g. Cardiff City Council host the Call Centre for Blaenau Gwent. This option would also need to address the issue of differing IT systems and the resilience and reliance of the all- Wales Broadband network

Option 5: A Flintshire Customer Service Centre

This would establish an in-house facility as a single contact point at the centre, to deal with all contacts to the Council. One-Stop Shop type provision in other County establishments and location would provide the customer with face-to-face contact. This option could make use of the VCC in the interim but the feasibility of maintaining that development would be subject to further analysis and appraisal.

Option 6: Continuing with the VCC Approach

If the current deployment were to be continued and successfully deployed across all service areas and delivery points, then the recommendations from the AC Staged Inspection, the issues and considerations highlighted in this study, and far wider considerations would need to be fully addressed